OVERSIGHT OF CHAPTER 31, 38 U.S.C., THE VA'S VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND EMPLOYMENT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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CONTENTS

SEPTEMBER 10, 1985

Page

Oversight of chapter 31, 38 U.S.C. the VA's Vocational Rehabiliation Program 1

OPENING STATEMENTS

Chairman Daschle 1
Hon. Bob McEwen 3

WITNESSES

Cullinan, Dennis M., special assistant, national legislative service, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States 11
Prepared statement of Mr. Cullinan 49
Drach, Ronald W., national employment director, Disabled American Veterans 14
Prepared statement of Mr. Drach 61
Egan, Paul S., deputy director, national legislative commission, and John F. Sommer, Jr., deputy director, national veterans' affairs and rehabilitation commission, the American Legion 27
Prepared statement of Mr. Egan and Mr. Sommer 86
Moran, Bob, associate legislative director, Paralyzed Veterans of America 25
Prepared statement of Mr. Moran 72
Rhodes, Dennis K., executive director, Vietnam Veterans of America 12
Prepared statement of Mr. Rhoades 54
Szymanski, Dena Mora, certified rehabilitation counselor, appearing on behalf of the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association 28
Prepared statement of Ms. Szymanski 94
Vogel, Raymond J., Chief Benefits Director, Department of Veterans' Benefits, Veterans' Administration, accompanied by Dennis R. Wyant, Director, Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service, Veterans' Administration; and James P. Kane, VA assistant general counsel 4
Prepared statement of Mr. Vogel 33

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Statements:
AMVETS 99
Blinded Veterans of America 104
Written committee questions and their response:
Chairman Daschle to Veterans' Administration 107
Chairman Daschle to DAV 131

OVERSIGHT OF CHAPTER 31, 38 U.S.C., THE VA'S VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1985.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:05 p.m., in room 334, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Thomas A. Daschle (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Daschle, Kaptur, Bryant, McEwen, and Hendon.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DASCHLE

Mr. DASCHLE. The committee will come to order.

Before we begin, I would like to apologize for having to reschedule this hearing on at least two different occasions already. I especially apologize to those who have had to make travel plans and cancel and remake many of their plans. To those who have been inconvenienced, my apologies.

Chapter 31 of Title 38 of the U.S. Code authorizes the VA to provide vocational rehabilitation and counseling services to veterans with service-connected disabilities. The purpose of this program is to enable disabled veterans to become employable, to obtain and maintain suitable employment, and finally, to achieve maximum independence in daily living.

Vocational rehabilitation for service-connected disabled veterans dates back to 1917 when Congress enacted the War Risk Insurance Act, legislation which created an entire package of benefits for World War I veterans, including vocational rehabilitation for disabled veterans. This program was terminated, as some of you know, on June 30, 1928.

On March 24, 1943, Public Law 16 of the 78th Congress reestablished vocational rehabilitation for disabled veterans of World War II. This program was subsequently expanded to include Korean veterans, veterans of the Vietnam era, as well as those veterans serving during peacetime who suffered disabilities while on active duty in the military. Except for certain changes in eligibility and benefit rates, the program was virtually unchanged from 1943 until 1980, when Congress enacted major revisions.

In 1980 Congress enacted Public Law 96-466, the Veterans' Rehabilitation and Education Amendments of 1980. Title I of this act

made extensive changes in Chapter 31 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. In addition to broadening the scope of this program and creating new services, Public Law 96-466 shifted the focus of Chapter 31 from simple restoration of a veteran's employability to the actual attainment and maintenance of employment itself.

On May 23, 1984, the General Accounting Office published a report entitled "VA Can Provide More Employment Assistance to Veterans Who Complete Its Vocational Rehabilitation Program." At that time the GAO concluded that despite the mandates of Public Law 96-466, VA regional offices had not provided to rehabilitated veterans all the employment assistance and follow-up services to which those veterans were entitled.

Today we want to examine many aspects of Chapter 31, but we particularly want to evaluate the progress made by the VA in implementing the provisions of Public Law 96-466. Have improvements been made since the GAO report was issued last year? What else needs to be done to ensure the vocational rehabilitation program for disabled veterans is the model program it deserves to be? I am sure we all agree that our major responsibility, at least on this committee, and our commitment, must be to those veterans who have suffered disabilities while serving in our Armed Forces.

The program established by Congress to provide these veterans with maximum independence in daily living and to assist them in their efforts to obtain and maintain employment must be effective and vigorous, and it must be a program that is implemented in full compliance with the law and the intent of Congress. Service disabled veterans deserve and should accept nothing less. As custodians of the program provided for disabiled veterans whose needs are the very heart of the benefit system, all of us must fully commit to fulfilling our particular responsibilities.

I have read that employment is "nature's physician" and is so essential to human happiness that idleness is considered the mother of misery. We have a program which, when fully implemented, provides the assistance and support necessary for our disabled veterans to achieve the level of satisfaction and self esteem which are derived from a job well done. Working together, we shall ensure that the vocational rehabilitation program achieves maximum effectiveness.

Before we proceed with our witness, I would like to point out that we have in attendance today members of the Veterans Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation. This committee was established by Public Law 96-466 to provide advice and consultation to the Administrator regarding the administration of veterans' rehabilitation programs. I know that all of you are distinguished in the field of rehabilitation medicine, vocational counseling, training, rehabilitation, the employment or representation of disabled veterans. In fact, I understand that Ron Drach, the Employment Director for the DAV, is chairman of the committee this year. We are delighted to have all of you here.

I want to not only reiterate my apology but also provide an explanation to the subcommittee. At 1:30 we will resume our very difficult negotiations on a farm bill for 1985. As you know, I come from South Dakota, and that is the bread and butter of our State. I

am very disappointed that once again I'm going to have to excuse myself to become involved in those negotiations. This is expected to be our final day, and in the final hours of any deliberative process like this, anything can happen. I want to be there to see that it doesn't, or in some cases that it does. I again apologize to those who have come so far to testify.

Marcy Kaptur, a Member of Congress from Ohio, will be here from 1:30 to 2:30 to take the Chair, and John Bryant from Texas will be here after that.

At this time I would ask the ranking member from Ohio, Mr. McEwen, if he has any comments.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BOB MCEWEN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FORM THE STATE OF OHIO

Mr. MCEWEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We meet today in an oversight capacity with respect to the vocational rehabilitation program of the Veterans' Administration. This is one of the VA's smaller program, but it is an extremely important one. Vocational rehabilitation for service-connected disabled veterans goes to the very heart of the VA's mission. Its purpose is to assist these individuals in entering the mainstream of employability.

Mr. Chairman, this hearing will enable our subcommittee to obtain information necessary to determine how well the program is working. We need to keep ourselves advised of the program's status and accomplishments, but we need also to determine if any problems exist and, if necessary, we need to strengthen the program by legislative initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, the Vocational Rehabilitation Service of the VA has a number of rather new responsibilities. They include independent living services for very severely disabled veterans, pilot programs for other totally disabled veterans, outreach programs for disabled servicemen about to be released from the military, and "hands on" responsibility for assisting newly trained and educated disabled veterans in actually finding employment. Each of these areas will be touched upon today and I am anxious to hear testimony about them from our witnesses.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I have noted the fine efforts of not only the VA witnesses but also the representatives of the veterans' organizations in preparing for this hearing. The insight and knowledge they bring to us are invaluable and I join you in expressing my personal gratitude to them all. I also congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, for scheduling this oversight hearing on this important subject.

Thank you.

Mr. DASCHLE. Thank you, Mr. McEwen.

Our first witness is Mr. Raymond Vogel, the Chief Benefits Director of the VA. He is accompanied by Dr. Dennis Wyant, Director of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service. Will those two come to the dais at this time. I want to welcome Mr. Vogel and Dr. Wyant.

Mr. Vogel was recently appointed Chief Benefits Director and all of us look forward to working with him. It is a tough job and we

give you our congratulations as well as our best wishes, and occasionally our condolences. Dr. Wyant was formerly the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans Employment and appeared before this subcommittee in past sessions many times. We are pleased that he is here as well. I see that Mr. Kane is accompanying these two gentlemen. Mr. Kane, you, too, are more than welcome.

I assume that Mr. Vogel will be presenting a prepared statement. Please proceed.

STATEMENT OF RAYMOND J. VOGEL, CHIEF BENEFITS DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS BENEFITS, VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION; ACCOMPANIED BY DENNIS R. WYANT, DIRECTOR, VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND COUNSELING SERVICE, VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION; AND JAMES P. KANE, ESQ., ASSISTANT GENERAL COUNSEL, VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION

Mr. VOGEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am pleased to appear before you today. Your keen interest and active involvement in helping us to serve our nation's veterans is greatly appreciated. There is no doubt that our job would be a lot more difficult without your continuing support.

I have submitted a complete statement for the record. In the interest of time, I will limit my testimony to a summary statement and then I will gladly respond to any questions you may have.

I will start by outlining the initial steps taken to implement Public Law 96-466, the Veterans' Rehabilitation and Education Amendments of 1980, and summarize where we are today. I will then discuss services under other chapters, Public Law 98-77, the Emergency Veterans' Job Training Act of 1983, and Public Law 98-543, the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1984. I will end then with a synopsis of general issues relating to management of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service.

Mr. Chairman, Public Law 96-466 expanded the chapter 31 vocational rehabilitation program "to enable veterans with service-connected disabilities to achieve maximum independence in daily living and, to the maximum extent possible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment."

The initial steps taken by the Department of Veterans' Benefits to implement the totally revised chapter 31 program include: (a) the establishment of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service as a separate organizational unit; (b) the issuance of a series of comprehensive interim directives to assure that veterans could receive the new services as soon as the law became effective; and (c), a special outreach effort to advise potentially eligible veterans of program benefits and services.

I would like to update the statistics provided you in our last appearance before this committee in July 1983. At present we have approximately 23,600 veterans actively participating in a program of rehabilitation services. This is a seven percent increase from the same period last year. With this expanded authority, we are now able to do a better job of evaluating vocational potential. The initial or extended evaluation ensures that the veteran receives the

opportunity for a full exploration of the problems he or she encounters in obtaining and maintaining suitable employment.

Our records reflect the completion of 67,065 initial evaluations and 2,188 extended evaluations from October 1983 to July 1985. Mr. Chairman, along with our continued emphasis on developing individual written rehabilitation plans, which are the means through which the veterans' program goals are identified, we are pleased to report that 30,685 of these plans were developed or redeveloped between October 1983 and July 1985.

During fiscal year 1984, 5,003 veterans have been provided individualized employment assistance plans. Approximately 70 percent of these veterans have obtained and maintained for at least 3 months employment consistent with the planned objective. We are projecting comparable figures in the current fiscal year.

This summer we issued field instructions authorizing special payments to employers to encourage placement of disabled veterans who have completed training but who may be having difficulty due to their disability or lack of experience in obtaining employment.

Before leaving the area of employment planning, I want to briefly mention that improving coordination with the Department of Labor has been accomplished by our entry into the most comprehensive agreement with the Department of Labor to date. Our mutual intent is to maintain a closer working relationship and to assure that veterans receive the employment services they need in a timely manner.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, Public Law 96-466 authorized the VA to implement a 4-year, fiscal 1982 to fiscal 1985, pilot program of independent living services for severely service-connected disabled veterans. The results of the required study of this pilot program indicate that many participants are making progress towards achieving a higher level of independence and a perceived improvement in the quality of their lives. The final report, submitted to Congress in August, includes the Administrator's legislative recommendations to continue the program for 3 more years as a pilot project.

I would like to briefly summarize services provided under chapters other than chapter 31 and then will finish my testimony with some overall program management issues.

To assist nondisabled veterans, service persons and other eligible persons who plan to use their VA benefits under chapter 32, the contributory educational program, chapter 34, the Vietnam era GI bill, or chapter 35, the survivors and dependents educational assistance program, VR&C staff provide comprehensive counseling and assessment services upon request. From October, 1983 through June, 1985, 16,991 persons using chapter 32 or chapter 34 benefits have been counseled. During the same period, 3,255 persons have been counseled under chapter 35.

The VR&C service also provides comprehensive counseling and assessment services upon request to veterans eligible under the Emergency Veterans' Job Training Act, EVJTA. During the period October 1983 through June 1985, 22,072 veterans were counseled under that authority. In December, 1984 we undertook an outreach effort to those service disabled veterans who had requested assistance under EVJTA that were not yet employed.

Public Law 98-543, the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1984, established two temporary programs of vocational training and rehabilitation to certain VA beneficiaries--one for certain veterans awarded VA pensions and the other for certain service-disabled veterans in receipt of additional compensation because of a rating of individual unemployability from February 1, 1985, through January 31, 1989. Instructions necessary to provide services under both programs were in place by February 1, 1985. We are committed to issuing final regulations for these two programs by January, 1986.

Mr. Chairman, I would like now to move on to some current program management issues. Our major emphases have been on improving quality of services, upgrading management information systems, and enhancing staff development. Some of the steps being taken to achieve these goals I will list.

We have published final revised chapter 31 regulations and completed the major portion of 75 new program manual chapters. We recently instituted a central office quality review program to validate the field stations' ongoing quality reviews. Our field stations use the results of the special study on employment assistance to identify areas that need improvement and initiated in-service training to correct noted deficiencies.

The first phase of the TARGET support for the chapter 31 program has been completed and we have a development plan for a totally automated, on-line system for payment of subsistence allowance.

We have proposed a revised work measurement system which will give us a better measure of program outcomes and more accurate measures of productivity and effectiveness.

In 1984 and 1985 we provided comprehensive training programs for our VR&C officers and the systematic training of line staff is one of the areas in which we would like to intensify our efforts.

In conclusion, we have accomplished a great deal in the past several years. We are proud of the program we administer. However, we are constantly trying to improve the quality of the services we provide and the efficiency in providing these services. During the next year we will be working to further upgrade the employment assistance given disabled veterans and to ensure consistent services for all chapter 31 veterans through staff training and the publication of program manuals. We pledge our very best from the central office, the field staff and VR&C, and we would be glad to entertain any questions that you, Mr. Chairman, or members of your committee might have.

I thank you for the distinct honor of appearing before the committee.

[The statement of Raymond J. Vogel appears at p. 33.]

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. Vogel, thank you. It is refreshing to hear your statement and to derive from that what I perceive to be a positive approach to all of these challenges. I see it as somewhat of a departure from the past and I think it is a very welcome departure. I am delighted to hear and to read your excellent statement.

Mr. McEwen.

Mr. MCEWEN. I don't have any questions.

Are all three witnesses giving statements?

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. McEwen is asking whether either one of the other gentlemen appearing had a statement. I assume they do not.

Mr. MCEWEN. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I do have a question. The law was enacted in 1980, and yet the regulations came out in 1984. Do you have any insights as to why that took so long?

Mr. VOGEL. I would ask Dr. Wyant or Mr. Kane to respond.

Dr. WYANT. Well, it was very complicated. As you know, it completely revamped the vocational rehabilitation program in the VA. There were draft regulations that went out, a comment time in the Federal Register, and then the final regulations. Some of that just takes time. Another reason is probably our bureaucracy.

The main point is we did have interim circulars in the field and the program did start on time.

Mr. MCEWEN. How long did you operate under interim rules?

Dr. WYANT. Well, the program, as you know, was passed in 1980, and it was 1984 when we handed out the final regulations. We had interim circulars in the field in the mean time.

Mr. MCEWEN. In your estimation, and for my benefit as a Member of Congress, should I anticipate that a program of this nature would take 3 to 4 years to finalize in permanent regulations? Was this exceptional or was this more difficult than most, or was it early?

Mr. VOGEL. I think it is exceptional, sir. I think the level of difficulty and the all-encompassing changes in the program were rather difficult. I think it is far too long. We would agree with that. We take some pride in the fact that the provisions of the new law were implemented through informal directions issued by the VR&C staff and central office.

Training was held on those issues to try to get the program running as quickly as we could.

Mr. MCEWEN. I commend you for that. Thank you.

Mr. DASCHLE. I think Mr. McEwen hit on probably the greatest concern of the subcommittee at this point, and that is the delay. You're kind, and I don't think you have much of a choice to respond as you have to Mr. McEwen's questions. There may be good reason, but it seems to me that it's almost inexcusable that it has taken so long. I don't think that you, regardless of how bureaucratic a system may be, regardless of how complicated the process is—you know, we have won and fought wars that have not lasted 4 years. It's just ridiculous for us to be waiting this long for something that is so important to so many people.

I would like to follow up with a question relating to the new program manual. I understand that is not finished yet, either. When was the manual last updated?

Dr. WYANT. Prior to the 1980 law there were manuals in the field. New manuals are required now as a result of Public Law 96-466. In summary we have about 50 of the 75 chapters in draft, some in final form, and it is our goal to have them printed in fiscal year 1986.

Mr. DASCHLE. In fiscal year 1986. So some time during the next 12 months it will be completed.

I am also concerned that it took so long to publish the final regulations. Do you anticipate that the process is now so well under way that—whether we're talking about the printing or whether we're talking about the carrying out of the regulations now that they have been published—that the delays are pretty much behind us?

Dr. WYANT. I sure hope so. We plan to stay on schedule on this one and get them out in the next fiscal year.

Mr. DASCHLE. Is it your feeling that whatever caused the delays to occur, they now have been taken care of, that you don't anticipate further deliberation and delay?

Dr. WYANT. The nice thing about the manuals is that since they implement the regulations they are handled just within our own department and we will have no one to blame but ourselves if we don't get them out. We don't have to send them to any other agency or to any other organization for review. It will be within the Department of Veterans Benefits.

Mr. DASCHLE. I would like to ask if you would do us a favor. If you can see that at some point a delay of some kind is going to occur once again, I would like to ask that you notify the subcommittee and give us the reasons why. I think that would be very helpful. It would give us a better understanding and perhaps reduce the amount of frustration that has existed prior to the time that I took over the chairmanship of this subcommittee. We would like to be in better touch and have a better understanding of what has happened. So, to the extent that you can keep us regularly informed, I think it would be very helpful to us.

Let me ask you about the review of the regional offices. GAO found that the follow-up contact in the regional offices was inadequate. Who has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that the follow up is done and that adequate staff is available to do it?

Mr. VOGEL. The responsibility rests with the VR&C service and central office staff. The GAO report came so soon after the change in—or at least a swing in emphasis—from regarding rehabilitation as merely being trained, to regarding rehabilitation as not only being trained but being employed. I always thought we stopped a step short. We are really pleased with the law which gave us authority to assist in putting the veteran into the world of work.

I think the GAO study was issued in 1982, if I'm not mistaken. The law was passed in 1980 and we were underway in 1981. I think while probably there are a few cases out there where we haven't done the very best we could, I think we would be able to withstand today the scrutiny of a GAO appraisal of the rehabilitation and employment process.

Mr. DASCHLE. Do you think, if the GAO were to go out to the regional offices today, that they would find the dramatic variances from one regional office to the next that existed at the time they reviewed them for the first report?

Mr. VOGEL. I would hope not.

Mr. DASCHLE. That isn't what I asked. What would they find?

Mr. VOGEL. I think they would find a level of difference. I think Dr. Wyant and his staff are working to make sure that the compliance is full and complete. I think they would find some variance, unfortunately.

Mr. DASCHLE. What can we do to ensure more consistency among the regional offices?

Mr. VOGEL. I think part of it, sir, is in staff training. For many years the rehabilitation program came under two other organizational umbrellas—veterans assistance divisions in the field and adjudication divisions in the field—and didn't get the emphasis needed or the training it needed because it didn't have the visibility. I think the program is a pivotal one, one of the best things we do in the department.

I appreciate your comments about the life of that program. It stems from post-World War I. I think training and the emphasis and the separate identity the program has achieved, in large measure through your legislative and oversight caring, will get us on track. I think we're on track and I'm satisfied with the program. But Dr. Wyant has a task to get some better training done. We looked upon the program as a process of paying a subsistence allowance to people in training rather than assuring that they wound up in the world of work.

Mr. DASCHLE. I think you have hit one of the two keys, training. I think the other is on-site inspections, on-site visits. I think that the regional directors probably think, and justifiably so, over the last few years, that it really didn't matter. It seems to me that if that's the message they get, with all the different things they have to do, they probably put this over there and just didn't worry about it. And because there was no or very little on-site inspection, the on-site surveys were not done, that it just went on that way for a long time.

What are your plans to increase on-site surveys?

Mr. VOGEL. Dr. Wyant?

Dr. WYANT. During the last 4 years since this law has been implemented, we have visited each regional office, with the exception of Manila, at least once every 4 years. We would like to get that down to between 2 and 3 years. Since we have a new Chief Benefits Director, our schedule has increased during the past few months. We should be able to meet a schedule of at least once every 2 to 3 years. We also bring records into central office for statistical quality control, in addition to our regional office visits.

Mr. DASCHLE. Do you think that once every 2 or 3 years is sufficient?

Dr. WYANT. With the resources that we have available, and with the direction that we can give through our other communication tools, for example, we have initiated monthly conference calls, rather than the previous quarterly calls. It is our goal to have visits every 2 years. That would be consistent with the other services within the Department of Veterans Benefits.

Mr. DASCHLE. Are these announced surveys?

Dr. WYANT. Yes.

Mr. DASCHLE. Where they have plenty of time to prepare.

Dr. WYANT. Yes.

Mr. DASCHLE. Do you think that not announcing surveys once in a while would be helpful?

Dr. WYANT. I hadn't thought about it. I know one thing, that in our talks with the regional office directors and VR&C officers in the field, we want to make real sure that they don't view us like

the Inspector General's office or GAO. We would like to go out there and provide not only a survey to find out what is happening, but to provide training. If they know we're coming and we can look at their records, it provides us a better opportunity to provide training in the areas where there are weaknesses or deficiencies. We feel we can be of more benefit in doing it that way. We will leave it to the IG and GAO to do the other type of inspections.

Mr. DASCHLE. I think we have got to have both, as you say. I'm going to defer to your judgment. But I am skeptical, frankly. I don't know if it is the resources that prevents more active involvement on surveys or whether it is just your view that 2 to 3 years is satisfactory. My feeling is that, if the resources would allow, that would be much better to be even more regular than that.

That's the concern I have. I don't think the quality control is nearly what it could be. You may be able to do it in other ways, but if you can do it through quality control and improved training, my feeling is this is going to get the kind of attention it deserves.

I really believe that you both are interested as we are in pursuing a much higher quality performance in these regional offices. I just hope you're successful.

I have a number of other questions that I think, in the interest of time, I am going to submit to you for the record. But once again, I am grateful to the three of you and I wish you well as you proceed. I hope that you will stay in touch and let us know if your schedule gets delayed any further.

Miss Kaptur, do you have any questions?

Ms. KAPTUR. I have no questions, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DASCHLE. If there are no other questions, we want to thank you again for your comments this afternoon.

Mr. VOGEL. Thank you, sir.

Mr. DASCHLE. Our second panel is comprised of Mr. Dennis Cullinan, Special Assistant to the Director, National Legislative Service, VFW; Mr. Dennis Rhoades, the Executive Director of VVA; and Mr. Ronald Drach, the National Employment Director of the DAV. Gentleman, I am pleased that you are here.

At this time I am going to turn the Chair over to Miss Kaptur.

Ms. KAPTUR. (Presiding.) Good afternoon, gentlemen. I appreciate your testimony this afternoon. I wanted to say, it just goes to show, when I look at my colleague here, that members from Ohio certainly do carry great weight here on the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Mr. MCEWEN. Or else we're low man on the totem pole.

Ms. KAPTUR. Right. I am so happy we're able to be here and hear your testimony today. You are welcome to summarize it for the record, if you wish, or proceed directly. We certainly hope that incorporated in your testimony might be some reaction to what you have heard this afternoon.

Mr. Cullinan, would you like to begin, please.

STATEMENTS OF DENNIS M. CULLINAN, SPECIAL ASSISTANT, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES; DENNIS K. RHOADES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA; AND RONALD W. DRACH, NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT DIRECTOR, DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

STATEMENT OF DENNIS M. CULLINAN

Mr. CULLINAN. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I will summarize.

On behalf of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present our views regarding the effectiveness of the Veterans' Administration vocational rehabilitation program.

As you know, the VA has administered this program for a number of years. The enactment of Public Law 96-466 updated and expanded it in ways that considerably enhanced the VA's ability to respond positively to the multitude of needs of disabled veterans.

The VA's vocational rehabilitation program has, in our view, been well managed and has accomplished much toward assisting service-connected disabled veterans to lead meaningful lives. We have found VA personnel extremely competent in the counseling and psychological aspects of the program, but the handling of the multiplicity of employment-related issues and employment assistance as called for in the provisions of Public Law 96-466 could well stand some fine tuning.

One concern is that the staff in the vocational rehabilitation department has been shrinking since 1982. It has declined from a total of 651 personnel to 602, causing an increased case load for vocational rehabilitation specialists. This strain on vocational rehabilitation and employment personnel will be further exacerbated with the implementation of the provisions of Public Law 98-543, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 1984, which establishes trial work and vocational rehabilitation programs for certain veterans who are 100 percent service connected disabled and for certain veterans receiving a VA pension.

As with any large program, there is also a problem with training. Vocational rehabilitation specialists at the local level have not to our minds received adequate training in the employment arena, nor have they received appropriate guidance to clarify individual eligibility requirements.

Another shortcoming, a veteran in the vocational rehabilitation program cannot be adequately tracked within the existing VA system. The subsistance program is relying on 1958 technology which is not compatible with the TARGET system. There is a real need for this program to update its technology.

Finally, the Veterans' Administration established 23 career development centers to assist disabled veterans. This program has received limited emphasis and support which has resulted in the closing of six of these assistance centers. This situation is clearly not in the disabled veteran's best interest.

In summary, with the enactment of Public Law 96-466 and the consequent revision and revitalization of the VA vocational rehabilitation program, much has been accomplished toward affording

service-connected disabled veterans the opportunity to find and retain meaningful employment. Still much remains to be accomplished. You may rest assured that the Veterans of Foreign Wars will continue to work hard toward the furtherance of this highly valuable veterans program.

I would now express our gratitude for this opportunity to participate here today. This concludes my testimony.

[The statement of Dennis M. Cullinan appears at p. 49.]

Ms. KAPTUR. Thank you.

If it is all right with you, we will hold questions until we have heard from all the witnesses.

Mr. Rhoades, you are listed next.

STATEMENT OF DENNIS RHOADES

Mr. RHOADES. Thank you.

As I think the committee has emphasized during this hearing, nearly 5 full years have now passed since the passage of the Veterans Rehabilitation and Education Amendments of 1980, which brought the VA into the modern era and changed the focus of rehabilitation from training a veteran to become ultimately more employable to becoming actually employed in a job for which that veteran has been trained. I think that is a significant difference.

The years since the passage of Public Law 96-466 in 1980 have not been easy years to implement any program, least of all a program that requires such a major shift in emphasis as vocational rehabilitation.

Essentially, this program has had two things going against it. The first is trying to change 30 to 40 years of perception within the agency as to how vocational rehabilitation is accomplished, reorienting as it were, the mindset of the employees in the agency. That is very difficult. You can put out as many memos as you want. Changing people and changing their philosophy about mission is very difficult.

The second which I think has been hinted at here is resources. At the same time they have had this major shift at the VA, they have had declining resources. There are the obvious ones. The Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service, as my colleague from the VFW pointed out, has suffered from FTEE reductions imposed by the administration and OMB year after year. When you are trying to change a program, particularly when you're trying to develop a program to get veterans trained into jobs, FTEE reductions are highly damaging.

In many VA regional offices the case load now exceeds 200 for both counseling psychologists and the vocational rehabilitation specialists. That kind of a case load prohibits even adequate supervision of ongoing training, let alone job development and placement. What I'm saying is that the VA, in and of itself, given its resources, cannot hope to place veterans into jobs. Either the VA has got to have a large increase in staff input of resources in its VR&C division, or it has got to go somewhere else for job development services. But in any case, it has to stop the hemorrhage of person-

nel which has gone on in this division and is threatening the quality of counseling and supervision of training.

The General Accounting Office report points out that the lack of staff resources has really affected the VA's ability to get into the employment area, to write Individualized Employment Assistance Plans and so forth.

I might add that the VVA, along with a number of veterans organizations, has asked the same questions that Chairman Daschle asked: where are the VA manuals? We were told up front "we don't have the funds to print them." That is further evidence of declining resources.

I also wanted to comment upon central office surveys. Central office surveys and other services within the Department of Veterans Benefits are normally, to my knowledge, conducted about once every 18 months. I agree with this committee. The fact that they have been done once every 4 years is inexcusable, and I think 2 to 3 years is still inadequate. I think it should conform to some of the other services who do have an 18-month survey cycle.

There is a lot which needs to be done. Counseling psychologists and vocational rehabilitation specialists need awareness training; they need training in the real world of work. Most of the counseling psychologists I have met are academically very well trained, and do the best job they can, given their training. The problem is that they need to get out and become familiar with labor markets, surplus occupations, and demand occupations. They need to have a real sense when they are counseling a veteran of what that labor market is going to look like 3 or 4 years down the road when the veteran gets out of training. Does that veteran have a realistic shot at getting a job in that market? If that veteran doesn't, why start the training?

I think the VA can be of help to a certain degree by working with the Department of Labor, but I think there are a number of impediments to that. The first impediment is the Department of Labor's on-line field services are run by State governments and the VA and the State government have totally different resources. The VA regional office can work very well with the Employment Service office in the same city it's in. When you get into the outlying areas, however, that relationship becomes tenuous. An entirely different structure needs to be set up through the interagency agreement. We are hopeful that will happen.

The second concern is the DVOP employees themselves. They need extensive training and rehabilitation. We hope that that will take place as a part of the agreement.

I want to comment on one last item, the career development centers. If this committee looks at them you will see that they are basically paper artifacts for the most part. There are some good ones, one notably in San Diego. But there is a lot of equipment and time that was put into them and at this point most of them are dysfunctional. We may want to take a look at reviving the CDC's. But once again, that's a matter of staff resources.

I want to say in conclusion that we're glad to see that Dennis Wyant is heading this program. I can't think of anybody who knows more about the employment element in vocational rehabilitation than Dennis Wyant does. Perhaps his judgment and experi-

ence can be brought to bear to help the VA make this transition from training to actual job placement.

Thank you.

[The statement of Dennis K. Rhoades appears at p. 54.]

Ms. KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Rhoades, very much.

Mr. Drach.

STATEMENT OF RONALD W. DRACH

Mr. DRACH. Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman. I too, will summarize my statement in the interest of time.

I am a little ambivalent about being near the end because some of the things you are prepared to say have already been said. On the other hand, it gives you an opportunity to assess some of the things that have been said and perhaps offer a different perspective on some of those things. Before I do that, I will bounce back and forth a little bit between some of the things in my prepared statement and some of the notes I have made.

I want to just reemphasize something that Mr. Vogel said, that the purpose of chapter 31 was changed in 1980 and it is now "to provide for all services and assistance necessary to enable veterans with service-connected disabilities * * * to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment." I underscore that new purpose.

There was some mention about the DVB circular used in lieu of or in place of the regulations pending the publication of the regulations. I am reminded of a hearing not too long ago when it was brought forth that the Department of Labor had failed to issue regulations on a law that is almost 3 years old. I just wonder if DOL and the VA concurrently meet sometimes to talk about the best way to delay publication on certain things.

I think one of the problems perhaps is the lack of a printing budget within either DVB or vocational rehabilitation. DVB has not issued an updated vocational rehabilitation pamphlet. DAV made an offer to Acting Chief Benefits Director Hagan about a year or so ago, that DAV would be happy to print the pamphlet for them. Almost a year later I am informed informally that the VA has found some money in their budget to print that particular pamphlet. Maybe I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit, but I want to talk just briefly about the budget or lack thereof in DVB and within vocational rehabilitation.

In DM&S, they have spent, I understand, close to a billion dollars on research on rehabilitation. DVB has not spent a dime, to my knowledge. DVB cannot find money to print a pamphlet, and DM&S has published a 203-page booklet on rehabilitation R&D progress reports for 1984. I'm not necessarily advocating that vocational rehabilitation go under DM&S, but maybe DM&S could give DVB some of their money so that we could get some of the things that are needed in the vocational rehabilitation program.

Also on the subject of the circular, I went over the circular and, quite frankly, had more questions raised in my mind than the circular answered. In my prepared statement I think I have 10 ques-

tions related to the issues delineated in the circular that I hope at some point in time we will be able to get answers to.

I am not going to belabor the GAO report. I think everybody has read it and understands some of the concerns. One concern that I have was that the VA was unable to determine the employment status of 28 percent of their rehabilitated clients, despite the mandate, as previously stated, that employment and the maintenance of employment be an objective of vocational rehabilitation.

The individualized employment assistance plan I understand is working a little bit better, but GAO found that when an IEAP was completed, 55 percent of the veterans attained employment, compared to only 30 percent who did not have an IEAP. I think that speaks for itself. The importance of the IEAP is very obvious to me.

The GAO study reported "officials at some regional offices told us that they gave employment services a low priority. We recommend that the new Chief Benefits Director issue a directive to all regional office directors and staffs emphasizing that employment services should be considered a high priority", again in light of the law.

Also in my prepared statement I mentioned that there was no cooperation between the VA and the appropriate military component in DOD to deal with those disabled vets about to be discharged relative to vocational rehabilitation. I am happy to report that a recommendation came out of the Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation to Mr. Walters to contact Secretary Weinberger on that issue. Mr. Walters did and received a response from DOD that they will start cooperating with the VA to counsel and start the rehab process earlier on before these people are discharged from military service. Regrettably, it should have been done 20 years ago, but perhaps now it is not too late, at least for some people.

I just have a few other quick notes. I was asked this morning by Mr. George Conn, who is the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration under the Department of Education, to make mention of the fact that RSA and VA has a memorandum of understanding. I am pleased to comply with Mr. Conn's request to do that, but I would like to point out also that the VA and DOL have a cooperative agreement. Regrettably, that does not always work. It's fine on paper and it's fine at the Federal level. But what happens when it gets down to the State and local level, all too often it is not really understood at that level.

I am also happy to report that, based on a recommendation of the Rehab Advisory Committee, that the Office of Program Planning and Evaluation is proposing to do a cost benefit study of the vocational rehabilitation program, which we are very pleased about.

I would just like to conclude by talking about Mr. Daschle's comment about whether or not it is better to do a surprise visit on a survey. DAV does surveys of its offices also and it is something that we have talked about, the merits of advanced notice versus surprise visits.

I personally have some mixed feelings on both approaches. But I think, absent the actual surprise visit, I think both Mr Vogel and Dr. Wyant and their staffs, when they do the travel that they do, rather than do a survey, they could at least make spot visits or un-

announced visits in the cities they are in to the regional office and just do kind of a spot survey to find out what actually is going on. That is obviously not a substitute for an actual on-site survey, but I think sometimes you can catch people with their pants down, so to speak, if you do that on the spur of the moment.

Thank you very much.

[The statement of Ronald W. Drach appears at p. 61.]

Ms. KAPTUR. Thank you very much. I thank every one of you gentlemen for your excellent testimony.

I wanted to begin by asking each of you if you have any idea from your respective organizations of how many members have been served since the enactment of chapter 31. I am curious as to what kinds of comments you have received from your membership.

Mr. CULLINAN. I don't have the exact figures of how many of our members have, in fact, been served through chapter 31. I know that a good many of our membership would have, but as far as the precise figure, I don't know.

Ms. KAPTUR. Are they scattered equally throughout the country, Mr. Cullinan?

Mr. CULLINAN. Yes, they are across the country. Ours is a national organization. However, the feedback we have had, since our employment specialist has more frequent traffic with these individuals, it has been rather positive. There have been some objections and some dissatisfaction because the goal of achieving employment over just employability hasn't always been reached in each and every case.

I would say the consensus is more positive than negative with respect to chapter 31 and the program.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Rhoades?

Mr. RHOADES. Madam Chairwoman, I have no idea. Most of our members who I am familiar with, who have either been in vocational rehabilitation or have been associated with vocational rehabilitation, have been through it and are out. I know of very few people that come to mind who are currently in it or who have recently finished it. The feedback that we get on vocational rehabilitation comes mainly from our service reps.

Mr. DRACH. My problem with trying to answer that is how do you define "have been served".

Ms. KAPTUR. I'm waiting for you to do that.

Mr. DRACH. How many have received chapter 31 benefits, I can go back to our office and check our reports and tell you how many veterans we represented for chapter 31 benefits.

Now, my definition of "served" means that they have attained and have maintained suitable employment. We have no reporting mechanism within the DAV to measure that, but I think based on what GAO found, not as many have been served as could and should be served. So I would be happy to submit for the record the number of veterans that the DAV has assisted in chapter 31 benefits, with the qualification that they may not have been totally served by chapter 31.

If I may, there is one other point that I missed earlier and was asked to bring up. Mr. Conn, who is the Commissioner of RSA, is not here and was not asked to testify. Also, Mr. Shasteen, the As-

sistant Secretary of Labor, apparently was not asked to testify. I would ask the committee to consider keeping the record open for a reasonable period of time and ask both Mr. Conn and Mr. Shasteen to submit written testimony for the record, if that is acceptable.

Ms. KAPTUR. I think that is an excellent suggestion, Mr. Drach, and we will follow up on that.

Mr. Cullinan, do you have comments on that, anything additional?

Mr. CULLINAN. Not at this time, no.

Ms. KAPTUR. I wanted to ask each of you, do you work closely with the regional offices in trying to implement this program? Mr. Drach, you mentioned that you keep records and so forth. How do your service organizations attempt to work with the VA in order to make this program more successful?

Mr. DRACH. I guess, in a sense, because most of our members, or potential members, are the primary candidates for vocational rehabilitation by virtue of our organizational makeup and the membership criteria, we also are fortunate in that we have a nationally run and supervised and paid field staff, so that we provide the necessary training, salaries, and those individuals out in the field are accountable to our management staff here in Washington. We can measure, if you will, or we can demand some accountability as to what goes on.

We have various forms that we send information out, technical support, out into the field through memoranda, bulletins, technical guides, if you will, for lack of a better term. But at the actual field level, all of our service officers are well trained in the whole spectrum of veterans' benefits, those outlined in title 38, title 5, U.S. Code, and in some cases, CFR 20 dealing with employment and Social Security.

So the degree of involvement, to some extent, depends on the degree of input from the veteran community. If no veterans come to us seeking assistance under chapter 31, obviously, there is very little interaction. If we have a high work load in that particular area, then obviously our people are working very, very closely with the vocational rehabilitation people.

I think I can with some reluctance that the level of that activity is not what it could and should be.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Rhoades.

Mr. RHOADES. I will say, Madam Chairwoman, that both our service reps and our members do report to us from time to time their experiences with chapter 31 and discuss it with us.

I might also add, I have had some personal experience with vocational rehabilitation when I was a VA employee several years ago. I was asked by the regional office director to go down and do a thoroughgoing study of how the system was actually running. The quirks of the individual system quite aside, what I was able to deduce from the study were some basic systemic problems, and the efforts of both central office and that particular office to overcome those. I subsequently came back here to Washington and I have had a number of discussions with people that know rehab, including Dr. Wyant, and I found that many of my conclusions from the kind of survey I did were fairly valid nationwide.

Ms. KAPTUR. I have to be honest with you gentlemen. Just speaking for my own district in Ohio, we have heard almost nothing from our local veterans on the vocational rehabilitation program. I can't speak for any other member on the committee. However, I think it would be important for your service organizations to think a bit creatively about how to get the word out and make people aware of this opportunity. I am sure, with the other experiences we have had with Agent Orange and so forth, it is very hard to reach people. So your service organizations are critical in helping us reach the eligible veteran.

Mr. Cullinan, did you want to say something?

Mr. CULLINAN. Yes, Madam Chairwoman, I would like to address the question.

We, too, have a national staff which is concerned with employment issues and keeps our service staff in the field advised essentially of what is going on. Our service officers, for the most part, will work out of VA regional offices and local contact sites and will deal with veterans at that level.

As far as reaching out, it would be contingent upon the operation of each of our States. Our organization is broken up into departments or States. Some of these States or departments are more active than others in reaching out to the veterans through various publications, telling them what is available in the area of vocational rehabilitation and what perhaps they should take advantage of.

Mr. DRACH. I'm willing to commit to two things right now. One will be in the very near future we will do an article in our magazine that goes out to more than 1 million people on the vocational rehabilitation program. The other thing is a two-way commitment. I will commit the DAV, and hopefully Mr. Vogel or Dr. Wyant can concurrently commit the VA, that in a cooperative effort we will attempt to develop an outreach program to all potential eligible vocational rehabilitation clients and those who have been denied vocational rehabilitation to determine what other assistance we may be able to provide to overcome their employment handicaps.

Ms. KAPTUR. I really think that that kind of partnership could be helpful because there certainly is a very low level of awareness of this program. I think that would be excellent, Mr. Drach.

I have a couple of other questions, but I want to extend a courtesy here to my very talented and devoted colleague here from Ohio, Bob McEwen, who has been so wonderful with veterans all over this country.

Bob, I'm sure you have some questions.

Mr. MCEWEN. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

All three of you made reference to the employment staffing of the vocational rehabilitation program. Could you comment more on that? Do you feel an appropriate number would be 1,500, or are they missing it by 45, by 2, or do they have 100 too many?

Mr. RHOADES. Mr. McEwen, I think the first thing that has to be addressed is the inadequate staffing just to do the actual rehabilitation itself. With a case load of counseling psychologists and vocational rehabilitation specialists running nearly 200, particularly with the VRS's, that is an incredible case load. To my mind, they cannot adequately supervise the training, given that high a case load. Once that is dealt with and the case load is brought down to

adequate levels, then it depends upon what the relationship is of the office with the Employment Service, as well as the quality of employment service personnel. It is a difficult question to answer.

I would rather say the first approach, which I think makes more sense in terms of money, is to use existing resources from the Employment Service, take advantage of the out-stationing of the DVOPs under section 2003(a) of title 38. The VA should really train them, as well as establish a hierarchial system so you have coverage throughout the State. Try that first. Then if that doesn't work, let's go back and start looking. Maybe this has to be a job that VA has to do itself.

Mr. DRACH. On that subject, I don't have a hard and fast answer on what kind of ratio there should be. For example, in fiscal year 1982 vocational rehabilitation had 651 full time employees. For fiscal year 1986, they are down to 602. That's an obvious decline—

Mr. MCEWEN. There is not a presumption by the taxpayers of America that merely because a department had so much funding last year and so many employees, that just because it was done in 1981 does not make it sacrosanct that that is the epitome of what should be done henceforth, even for evermore.

I can think of our own business. We cut our overhead by two-thirds and can now, at the same revenue we had in 1980, we can now produce the same margin of profit merely because instead of having 5 contracts for telephones we now only have 1; instead of having 27 contracts with newspapers, we now have 1. We just did the things that you have to do.

There is a great belief among the taxpayers that a certain amount of that in government can sometimes pay off, that you can actually get better service, and to say an expenditure at any particular year, because it was higher, is superior to better service. That's my concern.

If you feel that 650 is what it should be, then I'm going to feel totally different about it when the VA says "Look, we can do it with 610." I would have a tendency to appreciate that. If you say 650 is about a third of what you need, then I'm going to have a different feeling. Does that make sense at all or not?

Mr. DRACH. I'm not prepared to say that 650 is the magic number, nor am I prepared to say that 602, the fiscal year 1986 figure, is the magic number. The only thing I am trying to show is the decline in actual personnel and concurrently an increase in responsibility and programs has occurred.

I'm reminded of my very first oversight hearing that I attended in the audience, where Bill Colberg, a former manpower administrator, said that he can do more with less. Well, certainly more can be done and certainly deficiencies can be overcome by better management techniques, so forth and so on. There is a lot there that can be accomplished.

But I am also reminded that in 1980, the Lou Harris Survey on Vietnam veterans indicated that 90 percent of the public surveyed in 1980—now, this was done shortly after the November elections—about 90 percent of the people polled said that there is not enough resources or enough being done for Vietnam veterans, especially in the area of vocational rehabilitation. So I concede to what you're saying in terms of the taxpayers' reaction, but I'm not sure that

the taxpayers have determined exactly where those cuts should all take place. Again, there is no easy answer to that particular issue.

Mr. MCEWEN. Let me just add to that that I'm not sure they said that cuts ought to be done at all.

Mr. DRACH. They didn't.

Mr. RHOADES. Mr. McEwen, I might also add on this issue of staff reductions, that VR&C is responsible for paying subsistance allowances, paying for the books, paying for the education or training of the veteran. I think you may reach a point, if you have too many staff reductions, where the taxpayers' dollars are seriously unguarded and there is a much greater chance for abuse of taxpayers' money. So again, that's a kind of balance that you have to achieve. That is why supervision is so important.

Mr. CULLINAN. Mr. McEwen, I would also like to reflect. I, too, do not have the magic number, but our information indicates that currently the vocational rehabilitation specialist has a case load of around 180, which is excessive. There also has been recently another provision of law which will further obligate their now meager resources. So it would seem that the 602 is a bit on the low side.

Mr. MCEWEN. What do you think would be an appropriate case load?

Mr. CULLINAN. Certainly no more than 100.

Mr. RHOADES. I would absolutely agree with that. Vocational rehabilitation specialists for example, they have to do a lot of traveling. They actually do traveling and visit the veteran on site, talk with the veteran about what problems he or she may or may not be having with the educational institution. If the veteran gets in trouble with the educational institution, that requires an on-site visit. It is all very labor intensive, particularly that part of it. I would agree that it should be no more than 100.

I think you have to take a look at their work measurement system, too. If you see employees with 125 percent productivity ratings, then it is surely not a matter of having efficient employees. That is simply a system where the work measurement system has been rendered useless because corners are being cut.

Mr. MCEWEN. My final question, if I may, would be a political science question. Who do you hold most accountable for the insufficient funding? You have said the program is managed well and—of course, I can't recall it happening in my three terms here, that someone has said the program was adequately funded.

Who is responsible? Who do you hold accountable for insufficient funding?

Mr. CULLINAN. Unfortunately, in my case I can't really answer with a "who" but, rather, a "what". What is the rather terribly unfortunate economic situation which has prevailed over the past 10 years. I think that, more than anything else, has had an adverse impact on both the funding of the program and the need for the program.

Mr. DRACH. I'm not really sure I want to name a name, but I will name a position. The Chief Benefits Director, to a large degree, determines where the budgeted resources are spent within DVB. I see a former Chief Benefits Director with a frown on his face up there. Of course, the incumbent of that position has many, many pro-

grams that he or she has to look at and determine how those moneys are going to be spent.

But I think in terms of the population to be served by that program, primarily the service-connected disabled veteran, I don't think the country owes a bigger obligation to any other group than the service-connected disabled veteran. Perhaps Mr. Vogel in his present position—we can't hold him accountable because he's only been on the job a couple of months. But I think we must ask him to take a good, hard look at the allocation of his already limited resources to find out if there isn't something else that can be done to help out the vocational rehabilitation program.

Mr. RHOADES. I think another responsible party, which tends these days to run agencies for the most part, would be the Office of Management and Budget. The agency has had some tough fights every year with OMB. A lot of times the OMB specialists make dollar determinations which ultimately become policy determinations and resource allocation determinations.

Mr. MCEWEN. Thank you very much for your help. I just find all this enlightening. I can see a dedicated and committed veteran like Max Cleland who just got chewed up like wheat in a threshing machine, and then periodically it turns to OMB. I never cease to marvel at the fact that the Congress never catches it. We, of course, are the ones that appropriate the money. So I find it all very helpful and appreciate your contribution.

Ms. KAPTUR. I wanted to follow up here with an additional question to each of you gentlemen, since you know so much about this program. In view of your testimony, what do you consider to be the single most important difficulty in the way that the program under chapter 31 operates? If you could pick out one thing and you could fix it, what would that one thing be?

Mr. CULLINAN. I could sum it up very simply—limited resources. The funding is not what it should be. It is my understanding that the management of this program has been quite good. However, the funding is not enough to work with, not what could be hoped for.

Mr. DRACH. I would say attitude at the local level. As was indicated in the GAO report, local officials didn't see employment as a high priority—and I'm coming only from the employment end of it.

Traditionally, vocational rehabilitation specialists, counseling psychologists, are not geared toward employment as an end result of training. They're in the numbers game, how many people have been "rehabilitated", which means how many people successfully completed college or, perhaps a more generic term, training. There is no follow up either in the Federal sector or private sector, with the exception of perhaps work-related injuries, to assure that disabled people are returned to the world of work. So I think if we could change the attitudes and emphasize how important employment is to self esteem, then that would go a long way towards solving the problem.

Mr. MCEWEN. Madam Chairwoman, I would like to associate myself with his remarks. I think he hit the nail right on the head.

Mr. RHOADES. Resources, but let me define that. Within the Department of Veterans Benefits, they operate like a bank. You have

eligibility, you have entitlement, you cash your chits in and you get dollars—compensation, education, pension, home loans, whatever.

VR&C is a very unusual service to be in DVB because it works directly with people and it provides them direct services, counseling, supervision and hands on service to individuals. I am not so sure that within DVB, in putting together the Departments budget, in measuring how effective VR&C is, that there is an understanding of how different VR&C is as a service from all of the other services around it. I think that has a lot to do with resource planning and resource allocation within the agency and from OMB as well. I am not so sure if I'm making my point clear about that, but it is—

Ms. KAPTUR. I was sitting here thinking how would you change it as you're talking.

Mr. RHOADES. I don't know if you can change it, honestly, unless you completely change DVB, and I don't think that's going to happen.

Ms. KAPTUR. Thinking back to Mr. Drach's comments, we've got an attitudinal problem within the agencies, and we also have an attitudinal problem on the part of potential users—am I hearing this correct?

Mr. DRACH. I think another possible way to help solve it is to build in some accountability, perhaps make some merit pay raises or performance evaluations contingent on placement. If placement is the ultimate goal and attainment and retainment of employment is the goal of chapter 31, then perhaps there should be a measurement system whereby a vocational rehabilitation specialist and a counseling psychologist are measured by that end product—not the number of clients they see, not the case load they carry, but the end product.

As Mr. McEwen pointed out earlier in private industry, what is the end product; what are we paying people to do—to produce an end product. VA right now is not producing that end product that satisfies me.

Mr. RHOADES. VA is producing a lot of other end products, or has a lot of other end products that measures the effectiveness of VR&C. I think there are too many of them and I think they count too many papers going through too many paper mills.

I agree with Ron. To me, the end product is, is the person working in a job consistent with that for which the person was trained. That's the end product. That I think is the measurement and that I think is what performance ought to be judged on.

Ms. KAPTUR. Can any of you gentlemen point up to us places in the country where you think placement has occurred at a higher rate? I wanted to hear a little more about the regional variation in the implementation of this program.

Mr. DRACH. I can give you one report that I am very excited about. In Nashville, TN, the chief of vocational rehabilitation and counseling has come to an agreement with the regional office director, and I believe the hospital director in Nashville, whereby—just a very small example—any vacancy at the regional office or at the hospital is first given to the VR&C division to try and fill that position. So that it is tantamount to absolute preference for chapter 31 clients in those two stations or those two hiring sites.

Now, if you took something like that and implemented it nationwide and could somehow convince our private sector employers, who say they are committed to providing meaningful employment opportunities for disabled and Vietnam era veterans, to give first opportunity—10 days, 15 days, 30 days; pick out some arbitrary time limit—and have those vacancy announcements go directly to the VR&C staff and again, as part of the accountability, go out and say to that VR&C staff "you had 15 vacancies given to you last month and you only filled 3; why?" Maybe they don't have the proper people.

My other concern in this whole scheme of things—and I read something in the Wall Street Journal this morning—where there is now a dire need for court reporters. I can see every high school counselor in the country telling her students "Go be a court reporter." Three years from now we're going to have a glut of court reporters. You know, nobody looks at the local job market. We probably don't need court reporters in Paducah, Kentucky. We need them in Seattle, Washington or Portland, Oregon, but not Paducah. But that high school counselor is going to get a hold of that report and say, "I have the answer. You all are going to be court reporters." And where are we? We have a glut of court reporters.

I think if we can somehow again change attitudes, don't look at the study issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics or MIT or whomever. Look at the local job market. Talk to the chamber of commerce. Talk to the Kiwanas. Talk to the local business community and find out where are the jobs and what are the jobs in the next 4 or 5 years, so that we can put these people in training programs that are going to result in real job opportunities at the end of that training and not a job that is 3,000 miles on the other side of the country.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Rhoades.

Mr. RHOADES. San Diego. San Diego has, for a number of years, had a very unusual relationship between VR&C and the Job Service. They have some outstation DVOPs; they have had a local office veterans' employment representative. They work in tandem, very closely, with the clients. It may happen in San Diego because, for one thing, it's a very small office, and it also covers a small geographic area. So the regional office in San Diego is in a sense much more networked or has the capability of being networked into a definable community than most of the other regional office.

But that notwithstanding, if most of the other regional offices would get that kind of commitment and develop that kind of relationship with an active job unit, I think the placements would increase under the program, no question.

Mr. CULLINAN. We have had reports of particular successes. Unfortunately, I don't have the list itself with me. But I would tend to agree with my colleagues, that the most important thing is to change the attitude of certain individuals in the program and then to go ahead and research the local markets. I do know that's where some of the greatest successes have arisen, when it has been determined in a given area what is needed, then they go ahead and provide that.

Ms. KAPTUR. It sounds like the catalyst. In the Nashville situation, there was someone within the VA.

Mr. DRACH. He was the chief of the vocational rehabilitation counseling division in the Nashville Regional Office.

Ms. KAPTUR. And then in San Diego, was it the employment office, or who actually—

Mr. RHOADES. It was basically a sort of triumvirate. It was the veterans services officer, the VR&C officer, and the local veterans employment representative, a retired military man, who had a lot of drive. They worked effectively and closely together.

Ms. KAPTUR. I wanted to ask you gentlemen to make a comparison for me, if you could. The veterans jobs bill that has now been underway for well over a year and 4 months or so, how would you compare the implementation of that, which has had its own set of difficulties, to chapter 31? Is it better, worse, or the same?

Mr. DRACH. Given that we have a 31-year old vocational rehabilitation program, compared to a 2 and one-half year program, I would have to say that, all in all, the vocational rehabilitation problems has been running worse, because they have had 31 years to work out the bugs. If you go back to the original Public Law 78-16 right after World War II, and you look at some of the implementing regulations which then said, in essence, that employment was the goal—Mr. McEwen mentioned Max Cleland. You know, the reason why I think we have employment as a goal now, or as the end result now, is because of Mr. Cleland. We brought this to his attention back in 1978, and we felt very strongly that the administrative authority existed after World War II to make employment the end result. But Mr. Cleland wanted to hold out for legislation, which we supported, and that's all well and good. But when you go back and ask the VA to attest to the success of vocational rehabilitation and how many disabled vets have successfully completed vocational rehabilitation and who are now working in the field for which they were trained over the last 30 years, and they can't tell us, and to some degree we can measure the success of EVJTA, I would have to take a hard look at it, giving the vocational rehabilitation program a little edge in winning that race.

Mr. CULLINAN. I am inclined to approach that question rather gingerly since it is something along the line of who is guilty. But I would have to say that since the primary purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program—and it was changed in 1980, to gain employment for a veteran—it compares equally well with the other program. They each have their own benefits and they each have their own shortcomings.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Rhoades, did you have a comment on that?

Mr. RHOADES. Only to point out they are really very different programs. Vocational rehabilitation requires a longer time for real return. It also has a long institutional history where EVJTA had none. I think it is sometimes much easier to do something in an institution which hasn't had any experience in doing it than it is in an institution which has had a long experience doing it one way and then trying to change it.

Ms. KAPTUR. I really appreciate your comments because I wasn't here 30 years ago. When I first arrived in Congress, the Veterans Jobs Bill was one of the first pieces of legislation that I had the opportunity to work on and vote on. I have followed its implementation with some great trepidation and pain and pushing and all

the things that it takes to get something like that moving. So I was very interested in how you would view that compared to this one, which has been on line for so many years, and they each have their own set of problems. The reason they are somewhat the same is because, in my own mind at least, you are working many times with several other Federal agencies that have some interest in and direct responsibility for employment. It is interesting to see how the attitudes of people, how you get the word out to veterans, how you actually inform them and so forthaffect a program. So I did see a connection there.

Do any of you wish to make a further comment, because I think we would like to move on to the next panel.

I want to thank you very much for your testimony, for the fine work that you do from your respective service organizations, and I would encourage Mr. Drach and the others to give this a little publicity and continue working with the VA to get the word out on the program.

Thank you so very much.

Ms. KAPTUR. I would now like to call our third panel of witnesses: Mr. Robert Moran, associate legislative director of the Paralyzed Veterans of America; Mr. Paul Egan, deputy director, National Legislative Commission of the American Legion, accompanied by John Sommer, the deputy director, National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission of the American Legion; and finally, Miss Edna Szymanski, president of the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association.

We thank you for waiting for some of our lengthy questioning here. We very much appreciate your being with us today.

I suppose it would make sense to proceed in the order in which you are listed on the formal agenda, starting with Mr. Moran, if you would care to summarize or read your remarks.

STATEMENTS OF BOB MORAN, ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA; PAUL S. EGAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSON, AND JOHN F. SOMMER, JR., DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION, THE AMERICAN LEGION; AND EDNA MORA SZYMANSKI, CERTIFIED REHABILITATION COUNSELOR, APPEARING ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN REHABILITATION COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

STATEMENT OF BOB MORAN

Mr. MORAN. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Paralyzed Veterans of America appreciates this opportunity to express our views and concerns regarding the Veterans' Administration vocational rehabilitation program. I am Bob Moran, PVA's Associate Legislative Director.

Most of the provisions of Public Law 96-466 that significantly altered the program and expanded its range of services to help veterans obtain employment became effective on April 1, 1981. Since that time, the rehabilitation case load has remained at approximately 30,000 per year. Yet the number of vocational rehabilitation specialists located within VA facilities has steadily declined.

PVA is aware that budget considerations are a primary element in the effective operation and management of any program. However, the primary goal of the expanded vocational rehabilitation program is to enhance the potential for employment of the disabled veteran and then to assist in obtaining and maintaining suitable employment consistent with the individual's interest, aptitude and skills. If the VA's vocational rehabilitation program is to be successful in this mission, it is imperative that the program have the necessary and adequate trained staff to provide effective guidance and counseling to its participants.

PVA strongly believes chapter 31 benefits must be better utilized and be provided with greater emphasis to the most severely disabled veteran. The veteran with the severest disability must be recognized as the veteran with the greatest need and should receive vocational rehabilitation utilizing the most modern technology available.

Along with innovations in rehabilitation services there have been new technologies developed in the areas of prosthetics and assistive devices.

Ms. KAPTUR. Excuse me, Mr. Moran. Could I just interrupt you for a second?

Mr. MORAN. Sure.

Ms. KAPTUR. I apologize. I am scheduled to be at another committee meeting in my Banking Committee. Congressman John Bryant will take over the Chair at this point.

Thank you very much. Please continue.

Mr. MORAN. Along with innovations in rehabilitation services there have been new technologies developed in the areas of prosthetics and assistive devices. The Veterans' Administration once was clearly the world's leader in prosthetic research. Prostheses and other devices developed by the VA over the years have provided mobility for thousands of disabled veterans and have enabled many of them to pursue independent lives after the onset of disabling conditions. Between these efforts and those made in the private sector, there have been significant advances in helping severely disabled persons overcome limitations that arise from their disabilities. The VA must again assume leadership in these areas if veterans are to achieve maximum independence and an increased emphasis must be placed on research in these areas.

Another area we would like to comment on within the VA's vocational rehabilitation program is the need to modernize the administration of the program itself. If the program is to be truly enhanced to improve services to the nation's disabled veterans in hopes of becoming employed, the system has to be updated and all phases incorporated within the VA's computer data processing system.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, PVA would like to comment on and commend the VA in implementing section 524 of title 38 authorized by Public Law 98-543. This pilot program of vocational training for certain new pension recipients, which was enacted October 24, 1984, and became effective February 1, 1985, was implemented immediately by the VA.

As mentioned, PVA is very concerned about the staffing levels within the VA's vocational rehabilitation program and its effect on

successfully fulfilling its intended purpose. These reduced staffing levels can have a very adverse impact on this new and innovative concept within rehabilitation. This program is a major first step toward providing newly disabled pension recipients the opportunity to receive vocational training and enabling them to return to productive activity rather than relying on the VA pension program.

PVA hopes that the efforts of the VA will receive greater public attention through hearings such as this, and it is further hoped that increased resources and emphasis be directed toward these vital and necessary fields of research which, when coupled with the vocational rehabilitation program, will prove even more successful in assisting disabled veterans to achieve and maintain gainful employment.

This concludes my statement. Thank you.

[The statement of Bob Moran appears at p. 72.]

Mr. BRYANT (presiding). Thank you, Mr. Moran.

Mr. Egan with the American Legion.

Mr. EGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

John Sommer is with me and he is our Deputy Director of our Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission. He will summarize for the American Legion. However, we are both prepared to answer any questions that you might have when he concludes.

Mr. BRYANT. Mr. Sommer.

STATEMENT OF JOHN F. SOMMER, JR.

Mr. SOMMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. the American Legion certainly appreciates this opportunity to briefly comment on the VA's vocational rehabilitation program.

To begin on a positive note, we were recently pleased to learn that the Veterans' Administration is now seeking closer cooperation from the Department of Defense wherein DOD would provide the VA with the names and addresses of individuals who are separated from service by decision of a physical evaluation board. This will enable VA to immediately advise these veterans of their eligibility for vocational rehabilitation and for other available benefits and services.

One specific area of concern to the American Legion is the consistent and persistent reductions in personnel in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service and, in fact, in the entire Department of Veterans Benefits over the past several fiscal years. As mentioned previously, the number of veterans enrolled in the program increased by seven percent in fiscal year 1985. In addition, as has been previously mentioned, Public Law 98-543 established pilot programs to require vocational rehabilitation for certain service-connected veterans with total disability ratings due to individual unemployability and to provide training for certain veterans drawing non-service-connected disability pensions. This will certainly add to the work load of a steadily declining staff, making it more and more difficult to properly administer and operate the vocational rehabilitation program.

A random telephone survey of several American Legion department service officers throughout the country resulted in generally

favorable and complimentary comments toward the VR&C staff and their respective regional offices. The concerns that were expressed most frequently all related to overworked staff and a problem in locating participating employers in one area because of the particularly high unemployment rate.

We have reviewed the General Accounting Office report. In general, the GAO found very early in the new program that the VR&C staff in the eight regional offices had not provided all of the employment assistance and follow up services required by VA procedures to rehabilitated veterans.

We will not comment further on the report and its conclusions, other than to say that we find it rather superficial. No mention was given to the funding levels provided for the operation and administration of the program. This is not an attempt to absolve VA from all fault. However, GAO mentions the fact that the regional VR&C staff is faced with prioritizing its resources and states that some regional office officials claim that inadequate staff resources and the lack of adequate staffing training in providing employment services, particularly direct placement services, hampered their ability to provide these services.

Reductions in VR&C staffing levels, at a time when work loads are increasing, has been previously mentioned. In addition, regionalized field training, the printing of manuals and other materials, which have been discussed by earlier panels, and survey travel, are all dependent upon adequate funding of the program. We would be extremely interested in knowing whether or not the resources that are being allocated to the vocational rehabilitation program are sufficient for the VR&C staff to carry out their responsibilities in a completely effective manner.

The current experience of the American Legion, including our department service officers across the country in assisting veterans in applying for vocational rehabilitation benefits, is that we are receiving very few complaints. This, we feel, speaks well for the manner in which services are being provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling staff.

That completes our summary.

[The statement of the American Legion appears at p. 86.]

Mr. BRYANT. Thank you very much.

Miss Edna Szymanski, president of the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association.

STATEMENT OF EDNA M. SZYMANSKI

Ms. SZYMANSKI. Mr. Chairman and distinguished committee members, my name is Edna Szymanski and I am a certified rehabilitation counselor. I am honored to be here today as President of the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association.

The professional staff of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service have as their base rehabilitation counseling. That is their profession, no matter what titles they may carry at the current time. My testimony, therefore, deals with the profession of rehabilitation counseling as it applies to veterans.

I will try to cover briefly the following areas. First I will describe the profession and its complexity. Second, I will go into pre-service and in-service training, and I will go into the concept of adequate staffing in order to ensure quality service; I will try and deal with research and demonstration as a means of improving service delivery. Finally, and most importantly I will address, the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly veterans' disabilities.

First of all, I would like to talk briefly about disability. Let us pause for a minute to think of the concept in general. If we take, for example, a veteran who uses a wheelchair for mobility, what is his or her disability? Is it the physical impairment which causes them to use the wheelchair for mobility, or is it the environment which provides architectural and attitudinal barriers?

One definition of disability suggests that disability is the product of the interaction between individual and environment. If you think about it, you understand how the job of the professional rehabilitation counselor becomes very complex. He or she really has to understand the individual, the individual psychodynamics, the medical and psychosocial aspects of disability, and the functional limitations which arise from disability. In addition, the rehabilitation professional must understand the environment and how it can be modified in order to enable the individual to more fully participate.

The rehabilitation counselor works in the following way. He or she works to assist the individual in adapting to the environment, to assist the environment in accommodating the individual's needs, and works towards an optimal fit between the individual and the environment. That is a very difficult task. I have been doing it for about 11 years and I can attest to its difficulty.

Part of working with the environment includes a variety of skills we don't often think about and I think are really important when you talk about the final goal of employability. An individual professional in rehabilitation counseling has to understand job restructuring, job analysis, and has to have a good grasp on the recent developments that have been made in the field of rehabilitation engineering.

Right now there are a number of people who are able to live independently and are also able to function in employment simply because of developments that have been made in technology in the last 10 years. Whether or not those opportunities or capabilities are ever truly realized frequently depends on the vision of the rehabilitation counselor. I believe a rehabilitation counselor is a person who is able to see beyond the individual and his or her limitations, to see the person and the potential. We see beyond what is to what can be.

In order to do that, you need a person in rehabilitation counseling who is adequately trained in pre-service training. We at the American Rehabiliation Counseling Association believe that adequate pre-training means certification by the Commission for Rehabilitation Counselor Certification. Most certifications require a minimum of a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from an accredited institution by the Council on Rehabilitation Education. Those master's degrees cover many of the types of duties that I have described earlier.

53-388 O - 85 - 2

We also believe that in-service training is absolutely required if we are going to enable rehabilitation counselors to see the potential of the veterans with whom they are working. Without having in-service training, it is likely that people will not be adequately served by the agency and the true potential of the veteran, especially a veteran with a severe disability, may never been seen. Continuous in-service training is paramount if we are going to accomplish the goals of employment and independent living.

I would also like to briefly suggest that Public Law 96-466 has done a great deal to bring the agency up to par with the successful civilian rehabilitation program. The increased visibility within the last 2 years of the agency has been of great deal of assistance in helping veterans and counselors to understand the services and spread the word.

With that, I will conclude my remarks.

[The statement of Edna Mora Szymanski appears at p. 94.]

Mr. BRYANT. Thank you very much.

I am going to have a few questions that I would like to ask you. I know there are no official statistics regarding the unemployment rate for disabled veterans. I wondered if any of you could make an educated guess as to what the rate is. Mr. Moran?

Mr. MORAN. For our members or—

Mr. BRYANT. Well, for disabled veterans, whether they are members or not.

Mr. MORAN. I think the question was asked earlier. They were talking about their specific memberships, the numbers for their members. In that relation, PVA consists of approximately 12,000 members, half being service-connected, having entitlement to chapter 31 benefits. Of that—and I do not have the specific figures of our membership—we see an increasingly large number of our members who have participated in vocational rehabilitation as unemployed today.

Mr. BRYANT. Mr. Egan?

Mr. EGAN. It is difficult to know with any real certainty what the unemployment rate is for disabled veterans. First of all, you have to understand that someone who is more severely disabled is going to be less likely to be employed than someone who is not quite so disabled. You have to consider whether or not many of those who are severely disabled are simply not in the job market—that is, whether or not they can be measured is also a question. So it is really not very clear. But of the severely disabled, I would venture a guess that it's a very high percentage.

Mr. BRYANT. Miss Szymanski, does your association have any—

Ms. SZYMANSKI. We have no particular data on that.

Mr. BRYANT. I would like to ask if the VA vocational rehabilitation program can continue to provide adequate services to service-connected disabled veterans if the FTEE for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service continues to decline as it has in the past several years.

Mr. SOMMER. I don't see how it is hardly possible for them to complete the task that they are charged with in a responsible manner if they keep losing personnel every year as they have since fiscal year 1982, particularly in light of the fact that they are

facing an increasing work load. As was mentioned earlier, there was a 7 percent increase in the number of individuals enrolled under chapter 31 this fiscal year over last fiscal year, plus we have the two pilot programs that were just recently enacted with the individuals who are drawing a total rating based on individual unemployability and the pension recipients. So it would appear—and this is also based on information that we received from our department service officers—that the major problem that the Vocational Rehabiliation and Counseling staff have had in their respective regional offices was the fact that they have been understaffed and overworked.

Mr. BRYANT. Mr. Moran?

Mr. MORAN. I would have to agree with Mr. Sommer. As Public Law 98-543 authorizes vocational counseling to those new pension recipients, this is an increased work load of about 2500 per year.

As was mentioned earlier, we were talking statistics of work load, where vocational rehabilitation specialists within the VA were maintaining a 1 to 150 work load. I think on the State level it is more like 1 to 50. So without the FTEEs or the employees to implement the program as expanded by Public Law 96-466, and to take care of the increased work load for the new programs, I don't see how it is going to become possible.

Mr. BRYANT. Miss Szymanski.

Ms. SZYMANSKI. I have difficulty understanding how they manage to accomplish what they do with their limited staff as is. What I see having occurred is that their responsibilities have increased dramatically during the last few years. They are working with more severely disabled veterans, they are providing more services, and our economic times have become somewhat more difficult. Yet we are still asking them to do more and more with decreasing staff.

I am not sure I can understand how that will enable us in any way to provide quality services to veterans with disabilities.

Mr. BRYANT. I think the preceding panel was asked this question. What do you believe is the single most significant difficulty within the chapter 31 program and what action should be taken by the VA to eliminate that problem?

Mr. Sommer.

Mr. SOMMER. My perception is that the largest, single problem is resources and a lack thereof, and included in that would be personnel.

Mr. MORAN. I would agree. I think it has all been said today.

Mr. BRYANT. Miss Szymanski.

Ms. SZYMANSKI. Two things, personnel and also in-service training. There is a dire need for them to have a staff development and training budget which is adequate in order to help them to keep pace with developments in the last 10 years.

Mr. BRYANT. I am disturbed by the comment in the testimony presented by the Paralyzed Veterans of America, that 75 percent of their membership who participated in chapter 31 training remain unemployed. What comments have been made by your membership? Have they felt the VA personnel have extended sufficient effort to find them permanent employment? What is your feedback?

Mr. MORAN. We have experienced both phases of that. I think you have to remember, of those members, the service-connected who are eligible for chapter 31, we are talking of the catastrophically disabled, high level quadraplegics. Again, that is why in our testimony we reiterated the importance of the modern technologies and the devices. They play hand in hand. You know, the statistics we're not too proud of, but with hearings such as this and the new technologies which are available today, and the increase in the program, the expansion of services, not only to train the individual but in finding employment and maintaining employment, we are trying to improve on that figure. With our catastrophically disabled membership, that is just one of the problems we face.

Mr. BRYANT. Would anyone else like to comment on that question?

Mr. SOMMER. Mr. Chairman, we have 2.7 million members and it would be difficult to say how many had completed the chapter 31 program or give any employment statistics or other information such as that. We don't keep those types of figures.

Mr. BRYANT. Miss Szymanski.

Ms. SZYMANSKI. Our association doesn't have that kind of figure, also.

Mr. BRYANT. I would like to thank the panelists for being here today, as well as the previous panelists, for taking the time to prepare the testimony and come down here and give it to us.

The record will be kept open for questions to be submitted by members in writing. If it is permissible with you, we will submit them to you and ask that you respond further for the record in writing.

Thank you very much. The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:55 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

STATEMENT OF MR. R. J. VOGEL

Chief Benefits Director
Department of Veterans Benefits
Veterans Administration
Before
Subcommittee on Education, Training and Employment
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

House of Representatives
September 10, 1985

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

It is with great pleasure that I appear before you today to review and evaluate the improvements in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program authorized by Public Law 96-466, the Veterans' Rehabilitation and Education Amendments of 1980, with particular emphasis on the effectiveness of our efforts to assist service-disabled veterans in finding and maintaining long-term meaningful employment.

I will start by giving an overview of the major provisions of Public Law 96-466, the initial steps taken to implement the law, and a summary of where we are today. I will then discuss counseling services provided under chapters 32, 34, and 35 of title 38, United States Code, as well as under Public Law 98-77, the Emergency Veterans' Job Training Act of 1983 (EVJTA), and Public Law 98-543, the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1984. I will end with a synopsis of general issues relating to management of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service.

Public Law 96-466 updated the chapter 31 vocational rehabilitation program which had been in existence, virtually unchanged, for over 30 years. In previous years, vocational rehabilitation under chapter 31 was equated with training. Consistent with more recent concepts in the field of rehabilitation, Public Law 96-466 significantly modified the purpose of chapter 31 "to enable veterans with service-connected disabilities to achieve maximum independence in daily living and, to the maximum extent feasible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment."

The 1980 law newly authorized:

(a) Pretraining services for veterans to assess their employment potential and to plan for a program of services (initial and extended evaluations);

(b) a jointly developed individualized written rehabilitation plan of services;

(c) employment services for up to 18 months to assist veterans to obtain and maintain suitable employment;

(d) a pilot program of independent living services and submission of a report to Congress;

(e) initiation of research and demonstration projects which further knowledge concerning rehabilitation;

(f) establishment of a committee to advise the Administrator on rehabilitation issues; and

(g) a staff development program.

The first step taken by the Department of Veterans Benefits to implement the totally revised chapter 31 program was to establish, as a separate organizational unit, the VR&C (Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling) Service. To assure that veterans could receive the new services immediately, it was decided to develop a series of comprehensive interim issues first and then follow up with the new regulations. A special outreach effort was made to advise potentially eligible service-disabled Vietnam era veterans of the program changes.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to summarize where we are today and review with you the activities which have particular relevance to one of the VA's highest priorities-- the employment of veterans, particularly disabled veterans.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling staff are currently stationed at Central Office, 58 regional offices, and 28 decentralized locations. The field divisions and Central Office currently employ a staff of 586 which includes 253 counseling psychologists and 153 vocational rehabilitation specialists. Additionally, 13 contract guidance centers provide counseling and evaluation services to supplement VR&C staff, particularly in the cases of veterans and dependents requesting counseling under chapter 32 (the contributory education program), chapter 34 (the Vietnam era GI Bill), chapter 35 (the survivors' and dependents' educational assistance program), and other education programs.

The initial evaluation provided veterans eligible under chapter 31 ensures that they receive the opportunity for a full exploration of the problems encountered in obtaining and maintaining employment consistent with their abilities, aptitudes, and interests. Data developed during the initial evaluation provide a basis for comprehensive program planning. I would like to update the statistics provided you in our last appearance before this Subcommittee in 1983. From October 1983 through July 1985, 67,065 disabled veterans were provided initial evaluations.

Extended evaluations are provided for veterans so severely disabled that the feasibility of vocational rehabilitation cannot be determined during the initial evaluation. Up to 12 or more months of services may be provided in such cases to enable the VA to make an informed decision. A total of 2,188 seriously disabled veterans received this assistance from October 1983 through July 1985.

When a veteran is found eligible for and entitled to assistance under chapter 31, and about 67 percent of the applicants are found eligible, an IWRP (Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan) is jointly developed between the VA and the veteran. This plan is the means through which program goals specific to a veteran and the intermediate objectives needed to achieve these goals are identified. The number of IWRP's developed or redeveloped between October 1983 and July 1985 was 30,685. At present, we have about

23,600 veterans actively participating in a program of rehabilitation services. This number is growing and represents a 7 percent increase from the same period last year.

In those cases in which an unresolvable disagreement between the veteran and the VR&C staff member arises on the services to be furnished, the case is referred to the VR&C Officer or Central Office for review. If the veteran is not satisfied with the findings, he or she may appeal the case to the BVA (Board of Veterans Appeals). Our experience has been that by including the veteran in the planning process there are fewer disagreements and, in those rare instances where there are disagreements, resolution can generally be reached locally. Resolution of disagreements at the local level through professional review by VR&C staff, rather than immediate recourse to BVA, has proven to be in the veteran's best interest.

One of the most critical outcome measures of the program's success is the number of veterans suitably employed after program participation. To assure that comprehensive employment planning takes place, an IEAP (Individualized Employment Assistance Plan) is developed in each case in which the veteran is ready to pursue a specific employment goal. Like the IWRP, this plan identifies the specific services needed for the veteran to obtain employment.

During Fiscal Year 1984, 5,003 veterans were provided IEAP's. Of this number, approximately 70 percent of the veterans have obtained, and maintained for at least 3 months, employment consistent with

the planned occupational objective. We do not have data yet for this fiscal year, but we are projecting comparable figures. Although the current employment rate reflects an increase over the previous placement rate of 62 percent reported at the last hearing before this Subcommittee in 1983, we are working hard to improve this rate, particularly for the more severely disabled veterans. I would like to point out that the authority in chapter 31 enabling us to provide up to 18 months of counseling, placement and post-placement services generally gives the veteran ample time to gain confidence and stability in the new job. Employment services may include necessary medical treatment, transportation, job seeking skills, training and direct placement by VA staff. This summer we issued field instructions authorizing special payments to employers to encourage the placement of disabled veterans who have completed training but who may be difficult to place due to their disability or lack of experience. We commend Congress for including these essential provisions in the legislation.

Before leaving the area of employment services, I want to briefly discuss our coordination with the Department of Labor. As you know, Mr. Chairman, the VA has placed a high priority on maximizing resources through interagency coordination and cooperation. I am pleased to report that we are making significant progress in that regard.

In 1984, the VA entered into a revised interagency agreement with the DOL (Department of Labor). This VA/DOL Agreement incorporates and expands prior understandings regarding relationships and

responsibilities, referral procedures, the exchange of information, staff orientation and training, and the outstationing of DVOP (Disabled Veterans Outreach Program) staff in VA facilities.

The VA/DOL national agreement requires statewide agreements designed to be working documents for local staff. These agreements list liaison personnel for all appropriate departments by name or title, address, and telephone number; they spell out the procedures for referring a veteran to a specific individual or department in the other agency; they provide a detailed action plan for carrying out our mandate under Public Law 98-77; and they specify the local arrangements for the outstationing of DVOP's. We are now in the process of reviewing the statewide agreements to determine their adequacy. Those that do not meet established criteria will be returned for redevelopment. This current Agreement goes much farther than any of our prior joint statements. Our intent is to create a closer working relationship where interagency contact by phone or in person is commonplace. Our Nation's veterans are seeing the results; and, as reported in the Centaur Associates study of the EVJTA, which was recently forwarded to Congress, those veterans surveyed indicated satisfaction with employment services provided by the two Agencies.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to turn to the pilot program of independent living services. As you know, Public Law 96-466 authorized the VA to implement a 4-year (FY 1982 through FY 1985)

pilot program of independent living services for veterans with severely disabling service-connected disabilities and required that the Agency report to Congress on the results of this program.

In this program, the role of VR&C staff members is similar to their role in developing vocational rehabilitation programs; i.e., assessment, management, coordination and monitoring of rehabilitation activities. In conjunction with the veteran, VR&C staff determine the services necessary to achieve independence in daily living and develop an individualized independent living plan establishing the goals and objectives to be achieved. Staff then authorize and arrange for services identified in the plan.

Approximately 226 severely disabled veterans have participated to date in this pilot program. I would like to point out that the number of participants is related to the strict eligibility criteria for the program. Cases referred to Central Office for pilot program approval were critically reviewed to assure that achievement of a vocational goal was clearly not feasible. Over half the cases not approved by Central Office were returned to field staff for the purpose of exploring opportunities under the regular chapter 31 vocational rehabilitation program, since we determined that vocational feasibility existed or could not be ruled out. Thus, more than these 226 veterans directly benefited from the intake provisions associated with this program.

On October 11, 1984, our "Report on the Program of Independent Living Services and Assistance," was submitted to Congress as

mandated by law. Based on the results of this study, the pilot program of independent living services and assistance appeared to be having a positive impact on the participating veterans. Most of the veterans who had completed 1 year or more in the program were making progress towards achieving a higher level of independence. There was also evidence that program participants perceived an improvement in the quality of their lives and generally were pleased with the services they had received.

A follow-up report on this pilot program of independent living services was submitted to Congress this August. This report includes additional data, accomplishments of the program, conclusions regarding cost-effectiveness, and the Administrator's legislative recommendations to continue the program for 3 more years as a pilot project.

Mr. Chairman, I will now address the provision of the 1980 revision to the law which authorizes the establishment of the Veterans' Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation. The VR&C Service provides assistance and support for this committee which was established in March 1982. Jack Powell, Executive Director, Paralyzed Veterans of America, served as the first Chairman; and Ron Drach, National Director of Employment, Disabled American Veterans, is the current Chairman. We are optimistic that this committee will use its unique perspective to improve this Agency's rehabilitation services to veterans by providing recommendations to the Administrator.

The Veterans' Advisory Committee recently recommended that the VA conduct a cost-benefit study of chapter 31. The Agency currently is reviewing this recommendation. Based on another important committee recommendation, the Administrator has requested the assistance of the Secretary of Defense in providing the Agency with names and addresses of servicepersons who will be leaving the military as a result of a service-incurred disability. We believe that this advance identification effort might alert potentially eligible veterans of services available under chapter 31 as much as a year sooner than under current procedures.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to briefly summarize services provided under chapters other than 31 and will finish my testimony with some overall program management issues.

To assist nondisabled veterans, service persons, and other eligible persons who plan to use their chapter 32, 34, or 35 benefits, VR&C staff provide comprehensive counseling and assessment services upon request. From October 1983 through June 1985, 16,991 persons using chapter 32 or chapter 34 benefits were counseled. During this same period 3,255 persons were counseled under chapter 35.

The VR&C Service also provides comprehensive counseling and assessment services upon request to veterans eligible under the EVJTA. To assure that these veterans receive the benefits and services which best meet their needs, this comprehensive counseling includes review of eligibility under chapter 31 and other VA programs.

During the period October 1983 through June 1985, 22,072 veterans were counseled under the EVJTA program. In December 1984, we undertook an outreach effort to those service-disabled veterans who had requested assistance under EVJTA but were not yet employed. Almost 2,800 veterans were contacted and advised of their potential eligibility for services under chapter 31. These contacts resulted in 932 applications for services. Currently 174 of these veterans are receiving services.

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee and the Congress recently undertook another significant initiative in vocational rehabilitation for veterans with the passage of Public Law 98-543, the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1984. As you are well aware, this law established two temporary programs of vocational training and rehabilitation -- one for certain veterans awarded VA pension and the other for certain service-disabled veterans awarded additional compensation because of a rating of IU (individual unemployability) during the period from February 1, 1985, through January 31, 1989. The latter program also authorized specific services for certain veterans awarded an IU rating as of January 31, 1985. Instructions necessary to provide services under these new programs were in place by February 1, 1985, and services to VA pensioners and veterans with an IU rating are being provided.

The provisions for the IU pilot program required, by April 1, 1985, a one-time outreach effort informing all veterans awarded an IU rating as of January 31, 1985, of the benefits and services

for which they may be eligible under chapter 31 as well as additional rights or benefits afforded by 38 U.S.C. § 363. A letter was prepared and sent to approximately 80,000 veterans receiving IU benefits. Through July 31, 1985, 1,637 veterans responded to this letter. These veterans are being contacted by VR&C staff and scheduled for evaluations when appropriate.

Veterans who receive their IU rating from February 1, 1985, through January 31, 1989, and who fail to participate in a scheduled evaluation, due to reasons within their control, will lose this rating. A veteran's failure to participate in a planned rehabilitation program will be taken into consideration at the next rating review scheduled. To date, 14 veterans have been scheduled for evaluations of vocational potential and no veteran has been reported as noncooperative. Of the three veterans for whom evaluations have been completed, one was found feasible for training and is in a program.

Under the pilot program for VA pensioners, all veterans under age 50 awarded pension during the program period must participate in a vocational evaluation, unless circumstances beyond the veterans' control prevent such participation. Veterans age 50 and over may be provided an evaluation on request if they are found to have good employment potential in a preliminary review. Through July 31, 1985, 62 veterans under age 50 have been provided evaluations while 11 veterans age 50 and over have been furnished evaluations. Currently, 11 veterans under age 50 and 4 veterans age 50

or older are receiving training or employment services. Only two veterans have refused to participate in the evaluation process.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to turn to a review of some current program management issues. Although addressed last, it is one of the areas of greatest concern. Our major emphases have been on improving quality of services, upgrading management information systems, and enhancing staff development. I would like to highlight some of the steps taken to achieve these goals.

Two significant accomplishments which will improve the quality of services received by disabled veterans are the publication of the final, revised chapter 31 regulations and completion of the major portion of a new program manual. The new manual will provide VR&C staff with appropriate administrative procedures. We expect to have all 75 chapters of the manual in the field within the next fiscal year. Because of the time-limited nature of the programs authorized by Public Law 98-543, development of operating instructions and regulations proceeded concurrently. As previously mentioned, operating instructions were in the field by February 1, 1985. We are committed to issuing final regulations for these two programs by January 1986.

We have recently instituted a Central Office quality review program to validate the field stations' ongoing quality reviews. We are making many on-site reviews of field stations by Central Office

staff. We have received numerous comments from field staff about the helpfulness of this direct interaction.

To identify deficiencies and to emphasize strengths, field stations have completed a special study of the staff employment assistance they provide and have subsequently completed inservice training to correct noted deficiencies.

In the area of information management, we have completed the first phase of the Target automated processing support of chapter 31. We now have an on-line automated data base which tells us the phase of rehabilitation (case status), of each veteran from the day the veteran arrives in the VR&C division until the veteran has been meaningfully employed for at least 3 months. We are also able to obtain other data needed at the local level for Division management and at the national level for Service management.

I would like to point out that this revision of the Target system did not update the automated subsistence award payment process which is in serious need of modernization. However, a development plan for the total redesign of this existing system was completed in May. When completed in accordance with this plan, the system will provide a totally automated on-line system for payment of subsistence allowance.

From the perspective of field staff, one of the major barriers to providing quality service is the amount of required paperwork. In

an attempt to lighten this burden, we have automated our written monthly station report so that it is transmitted from field stations to Central Office via a telecommunications system. We have also eliminated eight recurring reports required of field staff.

Perhaps the most significant undertaking in the area of information management, Mr. Chairman, is the revision of our work measurement system. The revised system we have proposed generally resembles that of the Federal-State vocational rehabilitation system. But, most important, this system in contrast to our prior system will be less cumbersome and will give us a better measure of program outcomes and quality, as well as more accurate productivity and effectiveness measures.

Systematic staff development is one of the major means through which staff performance can be enhanced and improvements in the quality of services achieved. We would like to intensify our efforts in this area. In 1984, we provided an inservice training program for our field officers. Management of the VR&C Division' and provision of employment services were the primary concerns. At that time, a special handbook on employment assistance developed by the Veterans Administration under contract was distributed. In January 1985, we provided comprehensive training for field staff on the implementation of Public Law 98-543. To increase Central Office staff's understanding of field operations, we have had more Central Office staff participate in field station visits.

Similarly, we believe it is important that field staff become aware of Central Office operations and, therefore, we have increased participation by field staff in Central Office projects.

Both VR&C Officers and line staff in the field have expressed the critical need for direct line personnel training to supplement the Central Office inservice training of VR&C Officers. We firmly believe this training is critical to the delivery of high quality services. Such training, emphasizing employment assistance services, will be provided.

In conclusion, we have accomplished a great deal in the past several years. We are proud of the program we administer. However, we are constantly trying to improve both the quality of services we provide and our efficiency in providing these services. During the next year, we will continue to upgrade the employment assistance given disabled veterans and to ensure consistent services for all chapter 31 veterans through staff training and the publication of program manuals. To improve our efficiency, we will be enhancing our data processing capabilities. This will give better program management information and will allow us to provide benefits and assistance to our veterans more rapidly, effectively, and efficiently. We pledge our very best efforts from VR&C and would be glad to entertain any questions that you, Mr. Chairman, or Members of your Subcommittee, might have.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

STATEMENT OF

DENNIS M. CULLINAN, SPECIAL ASSISTANT
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING
AND EMPLOYMENT
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WITH RESPECT TO

OVERSIGHT OF THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM AS
AMENDED BY PUBLIC LAW 96-466

WASHINGTON, D.C. SEPTEMBER 10, 1985

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the Veterans of Foreign War's two million members, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our views regarding the effectiveness of the Veterans Administration's (VA) improved Vocational Rehabilitation Program as amended with the enactment of Public Law 96-466, the Veterans' Rehabilitation and Education Amendments of 1980.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, the VA has administered this vocational rehabilitation program for a number of years. The enactment of Public Law 96-466 considerably up-dated and expanded this program in ways that considerably enhanced the VA's ability to respond positively to the multitude of needs of disabled veterans. Briefly, the law provides that services and assistance necessary to enable service-connected disabled veterans to achieve maximum independence in daily living and, to the maximum extent possible, to become employable and obtain and

maintain suitable long-term employment be carried out through a number of means. Among these are: evaluation (or reevaluation) of a veteran's potential for rehabilitation; educational, vocational, psychological, employment and personal adjustment counseling; a work-study allowance; employment placement services; personal and work adjustment training; various training services and assistance, including tuition, fees, books, supplies, equipment and other training materials; interest-free loans; prosthetic appliances, eyeglasses and other corrective and assistive devices; services to a veteran's family to facilitate the veterans effective rehabilitation; services, supplies and equipment for homebound training or self-employment; travel and incidental expenses for job seeking; services necessary to enable a veteran to achieve maximum independence in daily living, and others.

The VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program has, in our view, been well managed and has accomplished much toward assisting service-connected disabled veterans lead meaningful and productive lives. We have found VA personnel extremely competent in the counseling and psychological aspects of the program. But the handling of the multiplicity of employment-related aspects of the program, as called for in the provisions of Public Law 96-466, could well stand some fine tuning.

As you are aware, 38 USC 1517 outlines the employment assistance that may be rendered to a veteran with a service-connected disability who has participated in a vocational rehabilitation program. This assistance may include direct placement, use of Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program's (DVOP), utilization of job development and placement services, assistance in securing a loan for self-employment in a small business, and active promotion and development in the establishment of employment training and other related opportunities. This

employment mechanism has yet to be fully developed by the Veterans Administration.

The staff of the Vocational Rehabilitation Department has been shrinking since 1982. It has declined from a total of 651 personnel to 602. With this reduction has come an increased caseload for the Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists now averaging approximately 180 cases per specialist.

As with any large program, there is a problem with training. The Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist at the local level has not received adequate training in the employment arena, nor has he received the appropriate guidance to clarify individual eligibility.

Title 38 USC 2003(A) allows for three-fourths of the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Programs Specialists in each state to be outstationed at Local Employment Service Offices. DVOPs who are not stationed at the Employment Service are to be stationed at centers established by the Veterans Administration to provide a program of readjustment counseling. To our knowledge, no DVOPs are presently being used in the vocational rehabilitation arena in accordance with 38 USC 1517. These individuals, with their employment expertise, whose duties and responsibilities are outlined in Section 2003(A) of Title 38, could significantly improve the employment assistance rendered to veterans in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Vocational Rehabilitation Department personnel under the able guidance of Dr. Dennis Wyant, have begun an aggressive outreach program. They have written to every disabled veteran who was certified under the Emergency Veterans' Job Training Act advising him of his benefits and potential benefits under the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. They are initiating a program with the Department of Defense to contact every active duty soldier who is in the process of being discharged due to medical disability or is going before a military Disability Rating Board in order to expedite his processing through the Veterans

Administration bureaucracy. It is estimated that if this program is successful it will cut at least one year off of the rehabilitation process, and the VFW applauds this positive action.

Title 38 USC 1519 provides for the Administrator to carry on an ongoing program of activities for the purpose of advancing the knowledge, methods and techniques and resources available for use in rehabilitation programs for veterans. The Administrator is authorized to make grants or contract with public or nonprofit agencies, including institutions of higher learning to conduct studies and research concerning psychological, educational, employment, social, vocational, industrial and economic aspects of the rehabilitation of disabled veterans. This includes developing new methods of rehabilitation and projects which are designed to increase the resources and potential for accomplishing the rehabilitation of veterans. According to Dr. Wyant, an estimated $1 billion has been spent by the Veterans Administration in research, though, to his knowledge, none has been allocated to the vocational rehabilitation arena. For example, there have been no studies on work site modification or accommodation.

Another shortcoming, a veteran in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program cannot be adequately tracked through existing VA system. The subsistence program is relying on 1958 technology which is not compatible with the Target system. There is a real need for this program to update its technology.

Finally, the Veterans Administration established 23 career development centers to assist disabled veterans. This program has received limited emphasis and support resulting in the closure of six of these assistance centers. This situation is clearly not in the disabled veteran's best interest.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, with the enactment of Public Law 96-466 and the consequent revision and revitalization of the VA Vocational Rehabilitation

Program much has been accomplished toward affording service-connected disabled veterans the opportunity to find and retain meaningful employment. Still, much remains to be accomplished. You may rest assured that the VFW will continue to work toward the furtherance of this highly valuable veterans' program.

I would now express our sincere gratitude to you and this Subcommittee for requesting our participation in this most worthwhile hearing. This concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman, I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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STATEMENT OF

DENNIS K. RHOADES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA

before the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

September 10, 1985

Mr Chairman, Vietnam Veterans of America is pleased to have the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee today to share our views on the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling program and its effectiveness in not only improving the employability of disabled veterans, but their actual employment as well. Nearly five full years have now passed since the passage of the Veterans Rehabilitation and Education Amendments of 1980. P.L. 96-466 brought VA vocational rehabilitation into the modern era by recognizing that the true measure of success for such a program is not a veteran who is more employable, but a veteran who is employed in a job for which he or she has been trained. It is thus time to examine closely how well the VA has been able not only to implement the new law, but in fact, to change its perspective of vocational rehabilitation.

The years since the passage of P.L. 96-466, have not been easy years to implement any program, least of all a program which requires such a major shift in emphasis as vocational rehabilitation. The law mandated that the VA become involved in assuring that its rehabilitated clients obtain employment consistent with their training, while during the same period staffing in both the Department of Veterans Benefits and the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service continued to be suffer from FTEE reductions imposed by the Reagan Administration and OMB. The fact is that job development and

placement activities are highly labor intensive. In many VA Regional Offices, the caseload, often exceeding 200 for both Counseling Psychologists and Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists, prohibits even adequate supervision of ongoing training, let alone job development and placement activities. Even basic materials seem to be in short supply. On numerous occasions VVA, as well as other service organizations, has requested copies of the rewritten DVB Manual, only to be told that, five years after the passage of the law, the manual was not yet available because there were no funds for printing it. Thus, in examining the VA's successes and weaknesses in the program thus far, we advise that this particular context be weighed carefully.

Mr. Chairman, VVA believes that unless a veteran finds a job in the field for which he or she has been trained, vocational rehabilitation for that veteran has failed. We believe that the VA has been successful in improving its outreach to veterans and serious in its efforts to make employment a critical priority in its program

It is clear, however, that there are problems with implementing the employment mandate of P L 96-466 which still merit attention. A May 1984 report by the General Accounting Office to Chairman Montgomery, for example, found that in a sample of eight Regional Offices, only 76% of veterans completing vocational rehabiltation training were

employed in a field related to their training. The VA's own statistics set this proportion at 70% in 1984. Even more disturbing is the GAO finding on the preparation of Individualized Employment Assistance Plans (IEAP). Despite the VA's own requirement that such a plan be prepared for each veteran at least 60 days prior to training completion, IEAPs were prepared for only 63% of the GAO's sample. Three of the eight Regional Offices were preparing IEAPs for fewer than half of their veteran clientele. Although GAO found deficiencies in many of the IEAPs that were prepared, it also found that veterans for whom the plans were prepared had a higher employment rate than veterans without them.

While VA field offices were amassing such a spotty record, Central Office field surveys were doing little to ameliorate the situation. GAO pointed out that some Central Office surveys did not address the new employment requirements and where they did, there was no followup to assure that the deficiencies were corrected.

Both the Central office and field station inadequacies suggest to us that VR & C at all levels has a considerable distance to go before there is a clear understanding within the VA that the purpose of vocational rehabiliation is not in and of itself training, but that training is a means to an end: a career-oriented job. This understanding is more than simply completing an IEAP. It is the knowledge of the

real world of work which enables VA employees to develop meaningful jobsearch plans. It is recognition that followup as a veteran reenters the labor force is extremely important, so that the Government's investment in dollars and the veterans investment in time pays off.

Understanding also means better planning prior to training. VVA has frequently noted that many VA Counseling Psychologists (CP), while qualified by academic training for their work, have little knowledge of the dynamics of the labor market. Too often, rehabilitation plans take the path of least resistance--enrollment in a four year academic institution, with little regard for the job at the end of training. VVA believes that CPs themselves should receive frequent training concerning national, state, and local labor market conditions and long term trends. Every VA Counseling Psychologist should be up to date on surplus and demand occupations. It is not enough in the course of counseling to translate the veteran's abilities and aptitudes into training. The training itself needs to be clearly translated into a job. VVA also recommends that the VA examine its quality control of counseling records to assure that accurate assessments are made of the ultimate success of rehabiliation plans in placing veterans to work.

To the casual observer, it might appear that a simple solution for resolving many of the problems associated with

employment would be to improve VR & C linkages with the Department of Labor and the Job Service staff, particularly employees of the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP). To a certain degree, that is correct. Close ties between a VARO and the Job Service are desirable, and both agencies have devoted considerable time over the last several years to improving their linkages, particularly in the area of vocational rehabiliation. There are, however, two basic impediments to creating a successful relationship.

The first is the disparity in the field structure between DVB and State Job Service agencies. Generally, there is only one DVB regional office in each state. While that office and its VR & C division can work well with the Jon Service office in the local community in which the station is located, the relationship rapidly becomes more tenuous the further away from the VARO the Job Service Office is. A coordinated system of referral and follow up, using DVOP staff, needs to be established in every VARO. Such a system would include an outstationed DVOP employee who would essentially coordinate the VR & C placement activities with Job Service Offices in the rest of the state.

The second problem concerns DVOP employees themselves. Few DVOP staff have training and experience in employer relations and job development. We believe that this is why the GAO reported that VARO employees were not happy with the

effectiveness of DVOP personnel. I wish to make it clear that this is not a problem with the quality of DVOP employees themselves. Rather, the problem stems from the continuous abuse of the DVOP by many Job Services and their local offices nationwide. DVOP staff are inadequately trained, are often mainstreamed, and are not performing the duties mandated under 38 USC 2003A. Mr. Chairman, we strongly recommend that this subcommittee conduct oversight hearings on DVOP and the Job Service in the coming year.

Mr. Chairman, VVA recognizes that the major reconfiguration of the VA's vocational rehabilitation program is not simple. I have appeared here today to outline a number of problems as VVA and its members perceive them and have suggested some avenues of approach. We are hopeful that the VA will continue to improve the program, and will receive the resources it needs to do so.

This concludes my statement.

STATEMENT OF
RONALD W. DRACH
NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT DIRECTOR
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
TO THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
September 10, 1985

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the more than one million members of the Disabled American Veterans and its Ladies Auxiliary, I would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to provide comments on the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program as it relates specifically to employment efforts.

The DAV is grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, and the members of this Subcommittee for holding these hearings. Your willingness to do so obviously reflects the sincere ongoing interest and concern of the Subcommittee and your desire to review and assess the various employment programs and their impact on this nation's disabled veteran population.

As we know, Mr. Chairman, no one can accurately quantify the unemployment rate among disabled veterans because little data are available for this group. There have been studies, reports and estimates on unemployment and we believe the results reflect that, even in the best of times, a totally unacceptable rate of unemployment exists among our nation's disabled veterans.

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Mr. Chairman, the DAV was founded on the principle that this nation's first and foremost duty to its veterans is the rehabilitation and the provision of adequate health care for our wartime disabled. Our membership, composed of honorably discharged veterans who were disabled during military service to our country, has continually supported adequate vocational rehabilitation training. We have long believed that this type of training is necessary to assure the disabled veteran an easy transition into civilian life. However, in reviewing the program over the years, it became apparent that all too many of these disabled veterans, in spite of vocational rehabilitation training, were not employed in occupations for which rehabilitation training was provided.

This program, as we know it today, was originally established by Public Law 78-16 enacted shortly after World War II. From its inception the program always had as its goal the restoration of employability. Mr. Chairman, the DAV, as well as others in the veterans employment community, believed that goal to be insufficient and, as you know, Public Law 96-466 made significant changes and improvements to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program-- emphasizing the attainment of actual employment in the field for which an individual veteran was trained.

Section 1500, entitled "Purposes," of Chapter 31, Title 38, U.S. Code now states, in part, "The purposes of this chapter are to provide for all services and assistance necessary to enable veterans with service-connected disabilities...to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment."

Mr. Chairman, the DAV is satisfied with the legislative intent of P.L. 96-466 and content of Section 1500 but is less than pleased with the administrative implementation of those 1980 amendments. In part, our dissatisfaction is based on the fact that the VA cannot take on increased work loads while, at the same time, experience a decrease in the number of staff personnel. In Fiscal Year 1982, the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service had the equivalent of 651 FTEE and by Fiscal Year 1985, that figure has decreased to 602 FTEE. Mr. Chairmar, in our opinion, it is most inadvisable to increase the responsibilities and scope of the program, as was necessary in 1980, then concurrently decrease the resources available to carry out those mandated changes.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to point out that the DAV recently selected the 1985 Disabled Veteran of the Year, who will be recognized this Sunday at our National Convention (July 21, 1985). This individual is a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist for the Veterans Administration in San Antonio, Texas. Mr. Chairman, in the VA Office in San Antonio, a Contact Office, for example, the Vcational Rehabilitation Counselor carries a case load of 200 disabled veterans and often travels over 1,000 miles per month in an attempt to provide meaningful services to veterans. The average case load for a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist (VRS) is 167.

In an effort to provide some guidance on the employment services to be provided to vocational rehabilitation clients, the Department of Veterans Benefits issued DVB Circular 28-80-3 (Appendix P) delineating specific responsibilities and authorities to be used to provide specific assistance as authorized. What is disconcerting, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that although the role of the VRS has expanded significantly, very little, if any, training has been provided to them over the past four years.

It appears that the provisions of the Circular raise more questions rather than providing answers. For example:

1. A disabled veteran must request employment assistance--how many requests have been made and how does the VA notify the veteran of the right to request such employment assistance?

2. Employment services may be provided for up to 18 months--how many veterans take advantage of this provison and what is the average length of time services are provided?

3. Certain travel expenses exclusive of actual moving expenses may be authorized to a place of employment--how many disabled veterans know of the benefit and how many have actually received it?

4. Seriously disabled veterans may receive reimbursement for extraordinary transportation costs incurred while seeking

employment--again, how many seriously disabled veterans know about or have received that benefit?

5. Refresher training or short term review courses may be provided under certain circumstances--how many disabled veterans have received that benefit?

6. Authorization is available to pay for a special license permit or a certificate if it is needed to fulfill an occupational or professional qualification--how many disabled veterans have received that benefit?

7. A disabled veteran who is receiving employment assistance may also receive certain supplies if those supplies are required by the employer of other similarly situated non-veteran employees--how many times has this benefit been provided?

8. If an individual disabled veteran is pursuing a program for self-employment, cooperation is to be achieved with the Small Business Administration to assure that the veteran receives special consideration, as required under the Small Business Act--how many disabled veterans have received this service?

9. Certain severely disabled veterans who have been trained for self-employment or homebound employment may receive initial stock and supplies to start up a business--how many severely disabled veterans have received that benefit?

10. In certain instances, an employer may be reimbursed for expenses incurred in training or initial employment of the veteran who has completed a training program under Chapter 31--how many employers have received this incentive payment?

Mr. Chairman, as you know, the Honorable G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery, Chairman of the full Committee, requested the General Accounting Office to prepare an audit of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program with specific emphasis on the employment assistance mandated by Public Law 96-466.

In its report dated May 23, 1984 (GAO/HRD-84-39), the GAO cited several deficiencies. I would like to discuss some of those deficiencies and offer some recommendations.

During a three month period (April, May and June, 1982), eight regional offices were reviewed and it was found that 208 veterans completed vocational rehabilitation training. Of those, 102 or less than half, were employed. Of those employed, almost 75% were employed in fields related to their training. The VA was unable to determine the employment status of 28% of the rehabilitated clients.

It is obvious from these data that the VA needs to develop a better system of doing a follow up on the employment status of all vocational rehabilitation clients. Also, we recommend that a

study be done of a given group of successful rehabilitants to determine their current employment status at given intervals following the completion of training.

Of the eight regional offices surveyed, seven did not provide required direct placement services. Also, about one third of the enrollees did not have a required Individualized Employment Assistance Plan (IEAP) and some of those plans in existence lacked the essential data needed. Significantly, when a IEAP was completed, 55% of such veterans attained employment compared to only 38% in the group that did not have a IEAP.

We recognize that the specific instructions for providing employment services were only issued five months prior to the GAO study. Therefore, some of these deficiencies are presently under review. Based on this information, however, we recommend that follow up action be taken by VA Central Office staff to assure that IEAPs are being prepared, as it is obvious that the completion of such a plan enhances the attainment of employability. Central Office staff should also assure that regional offices are providing direct placement services as required.

GAO also found that in 50% of the cases reviewed, regional offices did not comply with the requirement that a minimum of two follow up contacts be made with the disabled veteran. We recommend that this requirement be fully implemented and complied with.

Also, we understand that the following problem has been corrected, we are concerned that during the course of the GAO survey it was determined that on those occasions which VA Central Office staff did onsite reviews, they did not address the issues of employment assistance and follow up services. GAO points out that the problem still existed in certain areas some two years later. We urge the Director of Vocational Rehabilitation to assure that all onsite reviews incorporate an assessment of regional office employment assistance services.

In 1980, GAO advised the VA that its automated management information system contained numerous deficiencies. In 1982, when they did their more current review, those deficiencies still existed. We understand now that the VA has done much to put the Vocational Rehabilitation Program into its automated system, but problems still exist in the area of subsistence allowance. As we all know, considerable problems are caused when individuals do not receive this monetary allowances on a timely basis. The number of these situations could be markedly decreased by putting the vocational rehabilitation subsistence program on "TARGET."

While some training has been provided to the VR&C staff regarding employment services, we believe, based on other GAO findings, that more needs to be done at the higher management level to convey the importance of employment services provided under this program. In the GAO study it is reported that, "officials at some regional offices told us that they gave

employment services a low priority." We recommend that the Chief Benefits Director issue a directive to all regional office directors and staffs emphasizing that employment services should be considered a high priority.

GAO also noted, "Some regional office officials claim that inadequate staff resources and the lack of adequate staff training...hampered their ability to provide these services." Mr. Chairman, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program has undergone two major legislative changes in the last five years, yet, as pointed out earlier in my statement, they have absorbed a 7% staff reduction. These reductions, in our view, certainly support GAO officials who claim inadequate staff resources contributed to this low priority problem. We, therefore, recommend that the Chief Benefits Director do an internal assessment of the staffing problems within the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Further, additional training should be devised in the area of employment services.

Also, it is our understanding that there is no cooperation between the Veterans Administration and the appropriate military component (in the Department of Defense) to advise the VA of those disabled veterans on active military service who have a disability and who are likely to be eligible for and available to enroll in a program of vocational rehabilitation.

53-388 O - 85 - 4

We recommend that the VA Administrator and the Secretary of Defense enter into an agreement whereby the names of active military personnel who are scheduled to have a Physical Evaluation Board or otherwise determined to be disabled be provided to the VA for purposes of outreach and information on the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Mr. Chairman, we believe it to be a given fact that veterans are much less likely to receive these benefits and services if they do not know about them. To date, the VA has not issued an updated pamphlet on the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and is currently using a pamphlet that was published in July, 1982. We are hopeful that the issuance of the updated pamphlet will be imminent. The DAV has expressed a willingness to VA officials to print the pamphlet for them.

GAO also cited that the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialists assigned to the VA lack the necessary skills and training to be effective.

We recommend that the Chief Benefits Director meet with the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training to assure that the necessary skills and training are provided to these DVOP specialists.

We believe that an adequate assessment of the GAO findings, with appropriate steps to correct the identified deficiencies, will go a long way toward attaining the mandated goals of employment assistance.

Mr. Chairman, in our view, there have been several very positive steps that have been taken over the past several years that we believe will help to improve the VA's vocational rehabilitation program.

The DAV and representatives of other veterans' organizations have participated in two training sessions of the VR&C field staff. These two sessions were the first in recent memory wherein representatives of veterans' organizations were called on to speak specifically about employment related programs and services to the VR&C staff.

Also, when the DAV initiated its own pilot program of employment information in Detroit, Michigan last year, both the VA's Central Office and the Detroit Regional Office's VR&C staffs were extremely helpful in identifying disabled veterans and vocational rehabilitation clients for purposes of our outreach efforts. We believe that this type of effort and cooperation can go a long way toward improving employment programs and services for our nation's disabled veterans.

This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

PARALYZED VETERANS
OF AMERICA
Chartered by the Congress
of the United States

STATEMENT OF

BOB MORAN, ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

OF THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

CONCERNING THE

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION'S VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

SEPTEMBER 10, 1985

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, Paralyzed Veterans of America appreciates this opportunity to express our views and concerns regarding the Veterans Administration's Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Chapter 31 - Training and Rehabilitation for Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities.

PVA is grateful to you Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Subcommittee for conducting this hearing. We feel this clearly demonstrates the Subcommittee's sincere interest and concern for the effectiveness of the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program, and its impact on our nation's disabled veterans.

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The origin of the present Vocational Rehabilitation Program was a law passed by Congress on March 24, 1943, Public Law 78-16. The purpose of the program was to restore employability to World War II veterans who had an employment handicap due to a service-connected disability and, subsequently, the program was expanded to include Korean veterans and Vietnam Era veterans. With U.S. military forces serving all over the world, Congress expanded the program to include veterans serving during peacetime, who suffered disabilities while on active duty in the military, and in which their disabilities resulted in an employment handicap. Thus, the VA's vocational rehabilitation program is an ongoing and continuing program.

When considering the total veteran population of 28.2 million veterans, the participation within the Vocational Rehabilitation Program has been a small one since its inception, with less than 1 million veterans having trained under the program. Although more than 500,000 Vietnam veterans are entitled to disability compensation for disabilities incurred while on active duty during the Vietnam Era, and concomitantly are eligible for rehabilitation benefits under Chapter 31, approximately 150,000 have trained under the program. Today, there are approximately 30,000 veterans in training under the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Public Law 96-466 instituted a number of significant changes in the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Not only did this law serve to broaden the scope of the program and create new services, but even more importantly, incorporated the recommendations of the study mandated by P.L. 95-202, the "G.I. Bill Improvements Act of 1977." The study cited the need for a shift in the focus of the Rehabilitation Program. The recommended shift was from

simple restoration of the veteran's employability to a situation in which the ultimate goal of the program is actual employment.

There have been studies, reports and estimates regarding the unemployment of disabled veterans, but very little up-to-date data exists to accurately quantify the true unemployment situation of the disabled veteran population, nationwide. PVA statistics demonstrate a totally unacceptable rate of unemployment for the most severely disabled veterans. The VA's program of vocational rehabilitation has not led to employment for the catastrophically disabled veteran. PVA consists of over 12,000 members, all of whom have experienced spinal cord injury or illness, and approximately half of that number are service-connected, with eligibility for vocational rehabilitation under Chapter 31. Of those PVA members who have participated in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, approximately 75 percent remain unemployed today.

Mr. Chairman, if there has been one factor lacking, which was recognized and emphasized by P.L. 96-466, in the VA's program to successfully complete its intended purpose, it was the failure on the part of the Federal government to ensure that those individuals who successfully complete a program of rehabilitation are actually placed in employment for which they had been trained. An additional aspect, equally important, is to ensure that the individuals maintain their employment.

We will attempt to examine several factors which we feel have resulted in this severe unemployment problem among disabled veterans. Most of the provisions of P.L. 96-466 that significantly altered the program and expanded

its range of services to help veterans obtain employment became effective on April 1, 1981. Since that time, the rehabilitation case load has remained at approximately 30,000 per year. Yet, the number of vocational rehabilitation specialists located within VA facilities (those who provide the direct services to disabled veterans), has steadily declined.

In 1981 there were over 650 employees within the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program, consisting of counseling psychologists, vocational rehabilitation specialists, and clerical and technical support personnel, to counsel and assist disabled veterans. Today, that number is close to 600, a reduction of approximately 50 in a four year period, or a loss of over 12 per year. These reductions have occurred despite the expanded services created by P.L. 96-466 and the numbers of participants remaining at a constant level.

PVA is aware that budget considerations are a primary element in the effective operation and management of any program. However, the primary goal of the expanded Vocational Rehabilitation Program is to enhance the potential for employment of the disabled veteran and then to assist in obtaining and maintaining suitable employment consistent with the individual's interests, aptitude and skills. If the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program is to be successful in its mission, it is imperative that the program have the necessary and adequate staffing to provide effective guidance and counseling to its participants. From the statistics of PVA members mentioned earlier, it is evident that more severely disabled individuals require more direct supervision and guidance, if they are to be successful in finding and maintaining long-term, meaningful employment.

Therefore, PVA contends the VA has not provided to rehabilitated veterans all the necessary employment assistance and follow-up services required by VA procedures. Consequently, many veterans may not have been furnished all the employment services to which they were entitled to help them obtain and maintain suitable employment, the program's goal.

Another disturbing factor is that the final regulations for P. L. 96-466, which was signed into law October 17, 1980, were not completed until October 1984, some four years later. And, even more disturbing is now that they are complete, the manuals for full implementation of all phases authorized by P.L. 96-466, have not been printed due to budgetary constraints.

Coupled with the lack of the necessary regulations to adequately provide to disabled veterans all phases of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program is the absence of training at the grass roots level for the appropriate personnel. In a hearing conducted in July 1983, before this Subcommittee, the former director of the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation counseling services stated:

> "I would like to comment on professional training and staff redevelopment. Systematic staff development is one of the major means through which identified weaknesses in staff performance can be eliminated and quality improvement affected."
>
> "We are meeting staff development needs through ongoing in-service training, through formal education and training programs, through central office-sponsored training programs, through locally arranged professional meetings....etc."

Through information PVA has received from the field, some individuals within the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program have not attended a training seminar, directly related to their position, in over five years. And, other individuals who have had the opportunity to attend a seminar have traveled at

their own expense, except for an allowance for mileage for using their own vehicle; they received no reimbursement for food or lodging.

So when we read in a statement by the VA that:

> "as a result of our implementation of the many training initiatives, we are confident that improvements in the VA Vocational Rehabilitation Program, as envisioned by P.L. 96-466, have been made."

PVA certainly questions the accuracy of such a statement, based upon the information available to us.

Another serious problem that continues to exist in the vocational rehabilitation program is that veterans who have been disabled for a long time, and, who the VA has determined to be infeasible candidates for vocational rehabilitation, have for the most part been forgotten by VA personnel. These veterans have not been told of the expanded program, or given the opportunity to reenter the program. Nor have significant efforts been made to ensure the veteran maximizes independence, even if short of achieving employment.

The problem is that VA personnel and those with whom the VA contracts for vocational rehabilitation services have not kept abreast of modern-day employment practices and the requisite skills for entry-level positions into today's competitive employment market. This point was made abundantly clear in March 1984, when PVA, the George Mason University School of Law, the Disabled American Veterans, and a number of concerned private-sector employers sponsored a two-day seminar on employment of the handicapped. At that time, a variety of speakers addressed the need for updating the skills

that are being taught to handicapped persons by various vocational rehabilitation services (private, state, and federal). Too often rehabilitation programs are, in short, teaching outdated skills, which have little value today beyond being quaint personal hobbies.

The 1980 act, P.L. 96-466, was the first major change in the outdated provisions of the VA rehabilitation program since it was created in 1943; like the law itself, the requirements for employment and successful employment training have changed drastically.

Additionally, the VA's vocational rehabilitation program suffers from a needless fragmentation. For example, medical therapists who work for the Department of Medicine and Surgery (DM&S) certainly benefit veterans, but there is often a lack of communication between DM&S medical rehabilitation personnel and those who work for the Department of Veterans' Benefits. The latter group is responsible for carrying to fruition the improvements begun by the DM&S specialists. This situation is revealed when DM&S personnel make independent recommendations as to the suitable employment training needed for a disabled veteran, or when DVB personnel make employment recommendations without having the benefit of DM&S personnel's appraisal of the individual veteran's physical capabilities.

It is generally accepted that the primary objective of vocational rehabilitation is to facilitate the optimal vocational development of the disabled individual, which leads to meaningful employment. Implicit within this statement is the concept that satisfactory vocational training encourages adjustment in other daily living activities. And, though it is of

great value to discuss the humanitarian and social obligations to this country's disabled veterans, it is also significant to remember the economic aspect as well.

Public Law 96-466 declared that the purpose of Chapter 31 was to provide all the services and assistance necessary to enable service-connected disabled veterans to achieve maximum independence in daily living, and to the maximum extent possible, become employed and maintain suitable employment.

PVA strongly believes Chapter 31 benefits must be better utilized and be provided with greater emphasis to the most severely disabled veteran. The veteran with the severest disability or impediment(s) must be recognized as the veteran with the greatest need and should receive vocational rehabilitation, utilizing the most modern technology available.

Along with innovations in rehabilitation services, there have been new technologies developed in the areas of prosthetics and assistive devices. As we all know, the Veterans Administration once was clearly the world's leader in prosthetic research; prosthesis and orthotics developed by the VA over the years have provided mobility for thousands of disabled veterans, and have enabled many of them to pursue independent lives after the onset of disabling conditions.

Since World War II, the research efforts of the Veterans Administration have received acclaim for developing prosthetic devices that have benefitted veterans, and the VA has thereby served all of mankind. Between these efforts and those made in the private sector (including PVA's own research

activities), there have been significant advances in helping severely disabled persons overcome limitations that arise from their disabilities.

The VA must again assume leadership in these areas if veterans are to achieve maximum independence. An increased emphasis must be placed on research in these areas, utilizing Subsection 1519 of Chapter 31, Rehabilitation Research and Special Projects. Only through this interdisciplinary approach can disabled veterans receive the benefits of improved technologies.

Pursuant to the passage of P. L. 96-466, the Veterans Administration established within its Department of Veteran Benefits a pilot program of independent living services and assistance. The program was to be directed to the service-connected disabled veteran for whom the reasonable feasibility of achieving a vocational goal was precluded by the severity of his disability.

Without a vocational objective, the goal for each participant in the pilot program then became one of the veteran achieving maximum independence in activities of daily living and to become as self-sufficient as physically possible. The independent living program would provide such services as: 1) transitional living; 2) housing assistance; 3) peer counseling; 4) attendant training; 5) driver training; 6) adaptive equipment or home modification; 7) vocational training and job placement; 8) family counseling; 9) financial planning assistance, and 10) independent living skills. The pilot program, which terminates September 30, 1985, was limited to a maximum of 500 new veterans each year.

As an organization comprised of severely disabled veterans, PVA has a deep concern for the success of such a program. Based upon statistics by the VA as of December 1984, the independent living program, conducted by DVB, is not showing dramatic results. The VA's data indicates that only 286 service-connected, severely disabled, veterans have been referred to VA Central office for consideration of acceptance into the program. Of these, 207 were approved for project participation, but only 40 veterans have completed the program. Under provisions of this law a veteran can be enrolled in the program for 24 months, with up to a 6 month extension. Therefore, many have not had time to complete the program. We hope the Veterans Administration can give Congress a justifiable explanation as to the low rate of participation and completion.

Of critical concern to PVA is the fact that we, as catastrophically disabled veterans, know first hand the personal value of independent living; and as an organization, we want to see increased emphasis put upon independent living. Rather than judge an independent living program strictly for service-connected, disabled veterans, as mandated by P. L. 96-466, PVA suggests the program be operated system wide, with DM&S assuming the primary leadership role, and that the independent living program services be made available to all severely disabled veterans on a case-by-case basis.

The justification for such a program expansion is twofold; first and foremost, it is a humane and needed approach to the deinstitutionalization of certain catastrophically disabled veterans who are medically and emotionally stable, but who lack both the knowledge and the support system needed to be able to live independently in the community. Secondly, DM&S, in concert with

DVB's veteran counseling service, could effectively reach a large number of veterans who could benefit from such training and, in turn, save the VA monies in the long run, monies that are presently being expended in hospital and/or nursing home care.

Finally Mr. Chairman, the last area we would like to comment on within the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program is the need to modernize the administration of the program itself. On July 14, 1983, the Director of the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service stated:

> "Mr. Chairman, we have taken several steps to establish an improved system for providing management information and program evaluation to all levels of VR&C and VA management. We are taking additional long-range steps to improve our administration of the Chapter 31 program by an expanded utilization of the data processing support available through the TARGET system. The first phase, projected for fiscal year 1984, will enable us to track each veteran's progress through various phases of the rehabilitation process and help us to assure that appropriate action is taken."

The adjudication of the Chapter 31 program and the payment of the subsistence allowance remains today as it was since the late 1950s, still utilizing the use of a veteran's claim number, and not incorporating the use of social security numbers as in almost all of the other VA programs. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Chapter 31) is presently not interfaced with the VA's Target system. This practice of nonuniform record keeping leads to delays in the VA receiving the pertinent information about a veteran who has terminated his attendance in training. For veterans who have disabilities that sometimes interrupt their vocational rehabilitation, the delay in the VA obtaining the necessary information and suspending their benefits, thereby results in an overpayment, and places an undue financial hardship on the veteran. If the program is to be truly enhanced, to improve services to the nation's disabled

veterans in hopes of their becoming employed, the system has to be updated and all phases incorporated within the VA's computer data processing system.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, PVA would like to comment on and commend the VA in implementing Section 524 of Title 38 authorized by P.L. 98-543. This pilot program of vocational training for certain new pension recipients, which was enacted October 24, 1984, and became effective February 1, 1985, was implemented immediately by the VA.

As mentioned, PVA is very concerned about the staffing levels within the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program and its effect on successfully fulfilling its intended purpose. These reduced staffing levels can have a very adverse impact on this new and innovative concept within rehabilitation.

Public Law 98-543, which became effective February 1, 1985, authorized a four-year pilot program of vocational rehabilitation for newly eligible nonservice-connected disabled (NSC) pension recipients. This program, designed primarily for those veterans age 50 years or younger, is a major first step toward providing newly disabled pension recipients the opportunity to receive vocational training and enabling them to return to productive activity rather than relying on the VA pension program.

Modeled after the Social Security Administration's "trial work period," this innovative VA pilot program should prove to be both a reasonable and humane, yet cost-effective way to address the needs of disabled veterans in maximizing their independence.

Public Law 98-543 authorizes counseling for a new group of eligible individuals by VA vocational rehabilitation specialists. The number of veterans in this program is expected to be approximately 2,500 additional cases per year for an already overloaded staff. The work load of the vocational rehabilitation specialist, with its increased duties, has risen to a ratio of over 1 to 150. This means that every VA vocational rehabilitation specialist is maintaining an active workload of 150 disabled veterans. In comparison, most state vocational rehabilitation specialists carry a workload of approximately fifty active participants.

PVA is in constant contact with its service officers in the field and is very excited about the success of this program, which provides the opportunity for a disabled individual to rebuild his life and become a productive citizen within society. In just seven months since implementation, this new and innovative concept for vocational rehabilitation within the VA's pension program, already has disabled veterans in training. VA adjudication personnel are referring those veterans being awarded new pension benefits, who fall under the guidelines, to the vocational rehabilitation section for counseling and determination of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation benefits.

PVA believes that with the renewed emphasis in the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Programs for the successful employment of disabled veterans, and the increase in outreach being implemented by the VA, the aforementioned programs are going to be a success, increasing the number of veterans served.

PVA hopes that the efforts of the VA will receive greater public and government attention through hearings such as this. And, it is further hoped that increased resources and emphasis will be directed toward those vital and necessary fields of research, which when coupled with the vocational rehabilitation program, will prove even more successful in assisting the disabled veteran achieve gainful employment.

Mr. Chairman, again I would like to thank you and the Members of this Subcommittee for your sincere interest in these most important programs administered by the VA, and would also like to thank the Committee staff for their expertise and assistance in this matter.

This concludes my statement, I would be glad to respond to any questions that I can.

Statement of

The American Legion

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WASHINGTON, D. C. 20006

by

PAUL S. EGAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION

and

JOHN F. SOMMER, JR., DEPUTY DIRECTOR
NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION

before the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

OVERSIGHT OF VA's VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

September 10, 1985

STATEMENT OF JOHN F. SOMMER, JR., DEPUTY DIRECTOR
NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JULY 18, 1985

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The American Legion appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Veterans Administration vocational rehabilitation program provided under Chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, during this oversight hearing.

We commend the Subcommittee for undertaking this review and evaluation of the Veterans Administration rehabilitation programs for service-connected disabled veterans, as revised by Public Law 96-466, the "Veterans Rehabilitation and Education Amendments of 1980".

Prior to the enactment of PL 96-466, as the vocational rehabilitation program evolved over the years, the emphasis of the Veterans Administration was primarily placed on the restoration of employability to service-disabled veterans through programs of education and vocational training. Unfortunately, a void existed in the program, in that VA was not directly responsible for providing assistance to a veteran in finding gainful employment once the program of education or training was successfully completed.

Congress, in its wisdom, recognized the need for a complete examination of the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program and, under PL 95-202, mandated a study of its efficacy, and of the manner in which it was being administered by VA. The inadequacies and shortcomings found during the study provided the

impetus for the development of the comprehensive improvements that were incorporated in PL 96-466, and that were soundly supported by The American Legion. We viewed the enactment of this measure as a demonstration of the continuing commitment of the Federal Government in providing assistance to veterans with service-connected disabilities in their quest to overcome the obstacles that preclude their readjustment to civilian life.

One of the most important improvements in the program was the establishment of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service, and the significant expansion of the assigned mission of the program. The goal of rehabilitation is no longer limited only to regaining employability. A variety of rehabilitative services are available to fully enable a disabled veteran to reenter the workforce, and then to directly assist the individual in obtaining and maintaining gainful employment.

In addition, veterans now have additional time- up to 12 years following discharge (or longer in certain instances) - to take advantage of the program. The individual rehabilitation program, up to 48 months of training, may be extended if a veteran has a serious employment handicap.

A rehabilitation plan, jointly developed by the VR&C staff and the veteran, is utilized in planning the goal for each individual enrolled in vocational rehabilitation.

A pilot program was authorized under law during fiscal years 1982 through 1985 to provide independent living services and assistance for severely disabled veterans, for whom it is determined that a regular vocational rehabilitation program is not feasible.

Experience shows that between fifteen and twenty veterans per year have received these services. We understand that this seemingly small figure is due to the inability of program officials to locate eligible participants.

The outreach program carried out by the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service to advise disabled veterans of the availability of education and training assistance has obviously been successful. Currently there are 28,401 participants in the program, which reflects a nine percent increase over the number of veterans enrolled at the same time in FY 1984.

Currently, VA contacts veterans with service-connected disabilities after they are released from military service, which means that in many cases it is several months before these veterans learn of their eligibility for vocational rehabilitation. We were pleased to learn that the Veterans Administration is now seeking closer cooperation from the Department of Defense, wherein DOD would provide VA with the names and addresses of individuals who are separated from service by decision of a Physical Evaluation Board. This arrangement would enable VA to immediately advise these veterans of their eligibility for vocational rehabilitation and other available benefits and services.

One specific area of concern to The American Legion is the consistent and persistent reductions in FTEE in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service over the past several fiscal years. In FY 1982 VR&C Service was authorized 650.9 FTEE; FY 83, 632.1; FY 84 620.4; and FY 85, 598.2.

We are particularly concerned about the effect of these losses

on the delivery of services to the service-connected disabled veterans in the vocational rehabilitation program. As mentioned previously, the number of veterans enrolled in the program increased by nine percent in FY 1985. In addition, PL 98-543 established pilot programs to require vocational rehabilitation for certain service-connected veterans with total disability ratings due to individual unemployability; and to provide training for certain veterans drawing nonservice-connected disability pension. This will certainly add to the workload of a steadily declining staff, making it more and more difficult to properly administer and operate the vocational rehabilitation program.

A random telephone survey of several American Legion Department Service Officers resulted in generally favorable and complimentary comments toward the VR&C staff in their respective regional offices. The concerns that were expressed all related to overworked staff, and a problem in locating participating employers in one area because of the high rate of unemployment.

We have reviewed the General Accounting Office Report entitled "VA Can Provide More Employment Assistance to Veterans who Complete its Vocational Rehabilitation Program", released under date of May 23, 1984. The report, completed at the request of the Chairman of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, reviewed the case files of 208 veterans in 8 regional offices that completed vocational rehabilitation training during April, May and June 1982.

In general, the GAO found that the VR&C staff in the eight regional offices had not provided all of the employment assistance and follow-up services required by VA procedures to rehabilitated

veterans. We will not comment further on the report and its conclusions other than to say that we find it be superficial.

No mention was given to the funding levels provided for the operation and administration of the program. This is not an attempt to absolve VA of all fault. However, GAO mentions the fact that the regional VR&C staff is faced with prioritizing its resources, and states that some regional office officials claimed that inadequate staff resources and the lack of adequate staff training in providing employment services, particularly direct placement services, hampered their ability to provide these services.

Reductions in VR&C staffing levels at a time when workloads are increasing was previously mentioned. In addition, regionalized field training, the printing of manuals and other materials, and survey travel are all dependent upon adequate funding of the program. We would be interested in knowing, Mr. Chairman, whether or not the resources that are being allocated to the vocational rehabilitation program are sufficient for the VR&C staff to carry out their responsibilities in a completely effective manner.

The current experience of The American Legion, including Department Service Officers across the country, in assisting veterans in applying for vocational rehabilitation claims is that we are receiving very few complaints. This, we feel, speaks well for the manner in which services are being provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling staff.

Mr. Chairman, although it is not under consideration today, we would like to address another issue relative to VA educational assistance programs that is of interest to The American Legion.

During the past several years, technical and vocational, non-college degree (NCD) courses have become much more academically oriented, to the point that veteran students enrolled in these classes many times sit side by side in the classroom with students enrolled in degree (IHL) programs in accredited institutions. It is obvious that in this high tech era, most if not all technical careers such as electronics and computers require a much greater amount of classroom instruction rather than the hands on OJT type of training that once prevailed in technical and vocational training programs.

However, as the result of regulations promulgated many years ago, accredited degree granting institutions that maintain standards of quality equally applied and assured for each type of program, must discriminate against those veterans taking non-college degree courses by applying more stringent rules in areas such as course load measurement and attendance monitoring.

Because The American Legion believes that an inequity now exists in the application of regulations between these two types of programs, the National Executive Committee during its meeting of May 8-9, 1985 approved Resolution No. 4 (copy attached), that mandates us to support legislation to provide that veterans enrolled in non-college degree courses in those accredited institutions which offer both NCD and IHL types of courses be subject to the same regulations for those veterans pursuing IHL courses.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes our statement.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION, MAY 8-9, 1985

RESOLUTION NO: 4

COMMISSION: National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

SUBJECT: Support legislation to provide that veterans enrolled in non-college degree courses in those accredited institutions which offer both NCD and IHL types of courses be subject to the same regulations for those veterans pursuing IHL courses. (Origin: Res. No. 571 (SC) of the 1984 National Convention)

WHEREAS, accredited institutions, which offer both degree (IHL) and non-college degree (NCD) types of courses, maintain standards of quality tha are equally applied and assured for each type of program; and

WHEREAS, veterans enrolled in each of these types of programs have earned the right of equal treatment under the law; and

WHEREAS, accredited degree granting institutions, in order to comply with title 38, United States Code, must adhere to regulations which discriminate against those veterans taking NCD courses by applying more stringent rules in areas such as course load measurement and attendance monitoring; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes that an inequity now exists in the application of regulations between these two types of programs in that many changes have occurred in the area of technical and vocational education since the enactment of the World War II and Korean Conflict GI Bills - acknowledging the fact that vocational courses have become increasingly academically oriented; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, by the National Executive Committee of The American Legion in regular meeting assembled in Indianapolis, Indiana, May 8-9, 1985 that The American Legion support legislation to provide that veterans enrolled in non-college degree courses in those accredited institutions which offer both NCD and IHL types of courses be subject to the same regulations for those veterans pursuing IHL courses.

Statement On Behalf Of The
AMERICAN REHABILITATION COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

by

Edna Mora Szymanski, CRC
President, ARCA

on

Veterans Rehabilitation and Counseling Services

Prepared For

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Veterans Affairs
Subcommittee on Education, Training and Employment

September 10, 1985

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee: My name is Edna Mora Szymanski. I am a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. I have the privilege of working in the civilian rehabilitation program as the supervisor of 7 dedicated rehabilitation counselors who serve over 1000 persons with disabilities. Today I am honored to be here as President of the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association (ARCA) to present to you our testimony on Veterans Rehabilitation and Counseling Service. The American Rehabilitation Counseling Association is a division of the American Association for Counseling and Development.

I will address the issues of staffing levels, in-service training and research in the Veterans Rehabilitation Program. Veterans rehabilitation staff, whether they be employed as counseling psychologists, vocational rehabilitation specialists, or vocational rehabilitation and counseling officers, all have as their professional base - rehabilitation counseling. My remarks, therefore, will address the following areas: 1) The profession of rehabilitation counseling and its complexity, 2) The necessity for pre-service and in-service training for the provision of quality rehabilitation services, 3) The importance of adequate staffing levels in the provision of effective services, 4) Research as a tool for continually improving service delivery and 5) The rights of persons with disabilities, in particular Veterans.

My testimony will be based on the fundamental values and beliefs which underlie my profession - rehabilitation counseling. Rehabilitation counseling concerns itself with disability. Have you ever stopped to consider the concept of disability? Consider for example a veteran who uses a wheelchair for mobility. What really is his or her disability: the physical impairment or the disabling environment which makes mobility and access to employment and other normal parts of daily life difficult? The socio-political definition of disability suggests that disability is a product of the interaction between the individual and the environment.

The two-faceted nature of disability requires a great deal on the part of professionals who work with persons with disabilities. My profession, rehabilitation

counseling, assists persons with disabilities in adapting to the environment. We assist environments in accommodating to the needs of the individual. Rehabilitation counseling professionals work towards an optimal fit between the individual and the environment. In doing so, the counselor must address not only the individual and the community but also their respective attitudes about disability. By enabling individuals with disabilities to become successfully employed, the rehabilitation counselor positively shapes individual and community attitudes.

The job of the rehabilitation counseling professional is extremely complex. He or she must have a firm grasp on individual psychodynamics, medical and psychosocial aspects of disability and resultant functional limitations. Additionally, the professional needs to understand the environment and how it can be modified to accommodate the needs of the individual. Skills in job analysis, job restructuring, and an understanding of the potentials of rehabilitation engineering are requisite.

It is obvious that the job requires individuals with a strong belief in the potential and rights of persons with disabilities. Belief is surely not enough. Both pre-service and in-service training are vital. Pre-service training should provide a professional with a strong basis in understanding disability and how individuals with disabilities can be aided in achieving their full potential as participating members of our society.

It is ARCA's belief that the minimum qualifications for rehabilitation counseling professionals is certification by the Commission for Rehabilitation Counselor Certification. Most certification requires a Masters Degree from a program accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education.

Frequent, quality in-service training is absolutely vital for the effective practice of rehabilitation counseling. During the last decade, advancements in medical science and in rehabilitation engineering have proceeded at an unprecedented rate. Persons who would have previously been unable to work or live independently now have these opportunities due to recent medical and technological advances. Whether these opportunities indeed become actualities depends in great measure on the vision of the rehabilitation counselor.

He or she must be able to see beyond the disability and the limitations to see the person and the potential. The rehabilitation counseling professional sees beyond what is to what can be. Training is vital in maintaining this vision. An untrained counselor or one who has not kept pace with current developments often cannot see the possibilities for a client with a severe disability.

Research and demonstration programs in rehabilitation counseling are also necessary components of an effective service delivery system. They enable us to develop improved methods for serving persons with disabilities and to incorporate into our programs the advances made in technology and other areas. Without such programs, our service delivery systems would rapidly become ineffective and obsolete. The proposed computer-based demonstration project should enable veterans to more easily access information on occupational areas, training programs and employment opportunities. It will also provide for some Veterans a means to better understand their interests, aptitudes and abilities. These methods are already used successfully in private rehabilitation.

Having addressed these basics, let's look at the underlying values. You will find a strong correlation between the values underlying my profession and those which serve as cornerstones in our democratic society.

We, as rehabilitation counselors, believe in the rights of persons with disabilities to full participation in all aspects of society, especially employment. Let us now specifically consider Veterans with disabilities. These individuals have given substantial portions of their lives to work for our country, and those values for which it stands. It would seem to me that we have a very strong responsibility to those who acquire disabilities.

Our country has long placed a very high value on an individual's work status and ability to live independently. One's ability to work is intertwined with one's self image. A person with a disability who is enabled to work becomes a taxpayer rather than remaining a recipient of public funds. He or she also regains that sense of pride and self-sufficiency that comes with being part of the work force.

Mr. Chairman, my Association commends your concern for veterans rehabilitation as demonstrated by PL 96-466. This law substantially updated and improved the veterans rehabilitation program. It brought parts of this program up to par with the very successful civilian rehabilitation program. We also applaud the recent increased visibility of the Veterans Rehabilitation and Counseling Service. More veterans as well as the professional community are becoming aware of the services available through this agency.

It is difficult, however, to understand why the Veterans Rehabilitation and Counseling agency remains so understaffed and has such a limited in-service training budget. They are serving more veterans with more severe and complex disabilities, and providing more services in difficult economic times. It would seem that this country owes its veterans quality service from qualified professionals who are kept current in their fields. Our veterans have committed sizable portions of their lives to this country. Can we, as a democratic society, ignore our responsibility to assist these individuals to return, to the fullest extent, to participation in our society? If we continue the low funding levels for staff and staff development, we are certainly limiting necessary quality services for veterans with disabilities. Don't our Veterans deserve the help of well-trained, competent vocational rehabilitation professionals?

On behalf of the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association, I ask you to join with us and in partnership with citizens with disabilities as we work together towards a country in which all individuals, including those with disabilities, share equally in opportunities and benefits. We thank you for your interest in this issue and for this opportunity to express our input.

The American Rehabilitation Counseling Association offers to Congress any assistance or support we can provide to strengthen programs for all persons with disabilities.

The American Rehabilitation Counseling Association (ARCA) is a Division of The American Association for Counseling and Development

AMVETS
American Veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam
National Headquarters
4647 Forbes Boulevard, Lanham, Maryland 20706 (301) 459-9600

September 11, 1985

The Honorable Thomas A. Daschle
Chairman
Subcommittee on Education, Training
and Employment
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D. C. - 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Although we are regretably unable to appear to testify on September 11, 1985, we respectfully request the inclusion of this statement in the record of the proceedings.

AMVETS is pleased to present their observations. Should you or any committee member have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

James G. Bourie
National Service Director

JGB/dd

Enclosure

STATEMENT OF JAMES G. BOURIE
NATIONAL SERVICE DIRECTOR - AMVETS

Before The

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

VA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Mr. Chairman, AMVETS is pleased to present its views on the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

There is little doubt that the Vocational Rehabilitation program is an integral part of the VA's primary mission of service to veterans. It is an important program and one that AMVETS enthusiastically supports. We have over the years worked closely with the program's former director, Dr. Lemons, and continue a close relationship with the current director, Dr. Wyant.

Currently, over 23,000 veterans have received VocRehab service by the end of July, 1985, with an average year service of some 30,000 veterans. We are all familar with the May, 1984, GAO report entitled: VA Can Provide More Employment Assistance to Veterans Who Complete Its Vocational Rehabilitation Program. That report, in a review of eight VA Regional offices, uncovered: inadequate record keeping and follow-up; failure to comply with established policy/guidelines; lack of client contact for purpose of employment assistance; the automated management information system contained inadequacies and inaccuracies; and other problems. The report went on to further point up: that employment and training did not rank high in priority; lack of staff and sufficient budget; and that Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialists lacked the training and skills to place VocRehab clients. That last item should give the Office of Assistant Secretary of Veterans Employment and Training pause for concern.

Mr. Chairman, no form of veteran rehabilitation is complete unless the veteran is placed in meaningful employment. One that offers self-worth and economic independence. All the available training is meaningless unless that training ends with a job.

We have no doubt that Dr. Wyant is sensitive to the issue of rehabilitation and employment, having been the DASVES, as well as his previous association with the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. But that might not be enough to instill in the program's field personnel that employment should indeed have a high priority. We have, nonetheless, noted some positive movement; a recent VA/Department of Labor agreement on information and service sharing; VA pension recipients may now be eligible for VocRehab programs; and the just announced special employer incentives under Chapter 31. All are a step in the right direction, but when we get down to cases, the program's success or failure still rests with that VocRehab counselor and his/her ability to properly develop and follow through on client case work.

Therein, Mr. Chairman, this perhaps is the crux of the issue: that without adequate staff and resources, employment, and other issues will persist. More with less is a catchy phrase, but we think inapplicable when faced with an ever increasing case load. Rehab counselors handle an average 175 clients annually, more than their counterparts in state veteran offices.

Due to a lack of resources, other programs, initiates and mandates suffer. PL 96-466 required the VocRehab program to institute certain research, that has yet to be started. Or the issues of staff training and training manuals. The VA cannot run a "hodge-podge" VocRehab program: there must be adequate staff and resources, plus a staff that is trained and versed in the latest vocational rehabilitation techniques and procedure.

We can safely assume that there exists little real cooperation/coordination between S/ASDVETS, LVERs, DVOPs and VocRehab field chiefs and counselors. We, therefore, would like to see a greater coordination, in the field, between the VES and VocRehab. It is the responsibility of the OASVET to train and place DVOPs, and if they are not doing their job in VocRehab centers, then they should be removed.

Mr. Chairman, Vocational Rehabilitation and employment are inexonately tied together. Proper training leads to a decent job. However, there are very real pressures on the VocRehab program which cause us great concern over the future direction and ability of the program to accomplish its mission.

BLINDED VETERANS ASSOCIATION
1735 DESALES STREET NORTHWEST • WASHINGTON D. C. 20036 • 202 347-4010

STATEMENT BY NATIONAL PRESIDENT ROBERT ROUTH, JR.
IN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SEPTEMBER 10, 1985
(STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD)

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am very pleased to submit this testimony and present the views of the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) on the performance of the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program authorized by Public Law 96-466, the Veterans Rehabilitation and Education Amendments of 1980.

With the implementation of P.L. 96-466 five years ago, additional employment assistance responsibilities were added to the Vocational Rehabilitation Service. In 1981 there were over 650 employees within the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program; that is, counseling psychologists, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists, and clerical and technical support personnel. Staff were not only not added to handle these increased responsibilities but in the last three years, 50 people have been lost. Positions have been eliminated despite the increased demand and statutory authority. We are concerned about the need among severely disabled veterans for adequate staffing. If the Vocational Rehabilitation Program is to be successful, it is imperative that the participants have additional employment assistance.

In order for vocational rehabilitation to lead to career-oriented employment, staff need relevant in-service training. The present level of staff training is inadequate in that they lack sufficient experience

CHARTERED BY THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

working with individuals who are severely disabled. They also lack sufficient experience in providing counseling to veterans in order to maximize their employment potential. We would recommend more in-service training on rehabilitation as well as training which facilitates the translation of veterans skills into meaningful employment.

The VA has acquired a reputation for its advances in the development of prosthetic and sensory aids which have aided thousands of veterans in overcoming their physical limitations. Under Section 1519 of Chapter 31, Rehabilitation Research and Special Projects, there is the potential to do research related to vocational rehabilitation, however, none is being done at this time. Research should concentrate on adapted equipment for vocational uses. Some examples of possible research are work-site modifications and applications of computer usage for blinded veterans on the work site.

The BVA worked for passage of an amendment to the compensation bill which provides vocational rehabilitation to non-service-connected disabled veterans. We would like to commend the VA for writing the regulations in such an expeditious manner; however, there is a provision in this recent legislation which establishes eligibility for those pensioned on or after February 1, 1985. It was our understanding that this date was to be the effective date for the program, not part of eligibility criteria. We urge Congress to amend this public law to remit veterans who were placed on the pension rolls prior to February 1, 1985 to participate in this program of vocational rehabilitation. We feel this would be a cost effective measure.

The VA, pursuant to the passage of P.L. 96-466, established a pilot program of independent living services and assistance [illegible]

ment of Veterans Benefits. As you probably know, the program was designed for veterans with severe service-connected disabilities for whom the achievement of a vocational goal was clearly not feasible. In this program, vocational rehabilitation staff determine the services necessary to help the veteran achieve independence in daily living. This is done by developing an individualized independent living plan establishing the goals and objectives to be achieved. This program has been a tremendous help to severely disabled veterans who might otherwise not be able to function on their own, and we strongly support the continuation of this program.

Although we are aware that certain measures have been taken to process data and records under Chapter 31, more needs to be done in order to lessen the tremendous amount of required paperwork. This paperwork, which is done by hand instead of computer, still remains a major barrier to providing quality service.

I want to thank you for this opportunity and I will be very happy to respond to any questions which members of this subcommittee might want to submit in writing.

Office of General Counsel Washington D.C. 20420

Veterans Administration

OCT 4 1985

In Reply Refer To: 28

Honorable Tom Daschle
Chairman, Subcommittee on Education,
Training and Employment
Committee on Veterans Affairs
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

You will find enclosed our response to the questions raised in your September 11, 1985, letter to us. I appreciate the opportunity to address issues of concern to you and your Subcommittee. If you desire additional information, please contact me.

Sincerely yours,

Donald L. Ivers

DONALD L. IVERS
General Counsel

Enclosure

WRITTEN COMMITTEE QUESTIONS AND THEIR RESPONSE

Chairman Daschle to Veterans' Administration

1. I was particularly concerned by the GAO observation that VA Central Office on-site reviews of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling operations did not address employment assistance. Certainly, this lack of interest exhibited by Central Office sent the message to the field that the employment aspects of vocational rehabilitation were not a high priority. Has this policy been changed since the GAO report was issued?

Employment assistance is a program activity which has been, and continues to be, a high priority for the VR&C Service. The adequacy of employment services provided under chapter 31 has been addressed during each of the 63 formal on-site appraisals and 8 technical assistance visits completed by the VR&C Central Office staff since April 1981. VR&C Central Office staff found that in 26 of the 71 station visits (63 appraisals plus 8 technical assistance visits), the VR&C Divisions were not in full compliance with established requirements for provision of employment assistance under chapter 31. Formal recommendations were made in each instance in which deficiencies were found, and CO staff followed up to assure that the deficiencies found were corrected. These recommendations generally called for additional staff training and a reordering of staff activities. In addition to these ongoing appraisal and technical assistance visits, we recently requested that each VR&C Officer do an in-depth appraisal of employment assistance activities at their stations and take any necessary corrective action if deficiencies were found. The most significant challenge in improving employment services is realigning our resources to emphasize this activity without impairing delivery of other necessary services.

2. In testimony presented to the Subcommittee today, as well as in the GAO report, it is stated that training for the vocational rehabilitation staff is inadequate.

a. What funding is allocated for VR&C staff training for fiscal years 1985 and 1986?

b. How does this compare with other services in the Department of Veterans Benefits?

c. In your statement you indicate that employment assistance training will be provided for direct line personnel. Could you be more specific? When will this training be provided? What field staff will be included? Are you planning regional training conferences?

To insure that the practices and methods utilized in the veterans vocational rehabilitation program are in accord with modern concepts and advanced knowledge in the field of rehabilitation, three regional Central Office directed staff training inservice conferences are proposed for FY 1986. The conferences are planned to begin in April 1986. The conferences will focus on improving the skills of approximately 207 Counseling Psychologists and Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists from each of DVB's 58 regional offices as well as Central Office VR&C staff who will participate. Training will focus on increasing staff knowledge and skills in the practice of VA vocational rehabilitation. Major themes will be:

(1) placement and adjustment in employment as the goal of vocational rehabilitation;

(2) more effective service delivery;

(3) current techniques of evaluating rehabilitation potential; and

(4) new and revised VR&C Service policy and procedural issues.

During FY 1985, $47,000 was allocated to conduct a four-day workshop for VR&C Officers in Washington, DC. The workshop, which was held from January 28 through February 1, 1985, focused on implementation of the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1984 (PL 98-543), eligibility and entitlement for chapter 31 services, and training in VR&C computer applications.

During FY 1985 the following funds were allocated for conferences and training by the various DVB Services:

Veterans Assistance	$ 2,100
Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling	47,000
Education	45,000
Loan Guaranty	62,000
Compensation and Pension	129,000

3. During hearings held by this Subcommittee in 1983, the VA was asked what major rehabilitation research and special projects were currently being conducted by the VA. The response was that although the Administrator was authorized by PL 96-466 to carry out rehabilitation studies and research, the VR&C Service had not funded research and development projects.

Is the VR&C Service now sharing in the VA research budget? It seems to me that the vocational rehabilitation of service-connected veterans should be a priority item and many studies could be done to maximize the benefits of vocational rehabilitation. Do you agree?

We agree that the vocational rehabilitation of service-connected veterans should be a priority item and many studies could be done to maximize the benefits of vocational rehabilitation. While VR&C Service is not now sharing in the VA research budget, we are taking steps to rectify this.

4. Several of our other witnesses pointed out in their testimony that services provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service have been expanded, while the number of VR&C staff have declined from 651 FTE in fiscal year 1982, to 602 in fiscal year 1985. Do you agree with the other witnesses that this decline in personnel is alarming and could result in a decline in the quality of services provided disabled veterans? Are you planning any kind of reorganization to minimize the impact of declining staff?

The VR&C Service is experiencing difficulty in maintaining the quality and timeliness of counseling and rehabilitation services provided to veterans and dependents. Additional staff reductions would have very adverse effects on both quality and timeliness of services.

Employment in the VR&C Service from FY 81 through FY 86 is given below:

VR&C Service Employment
FY 1981 - FY 1986

FY 81 Actual	FY 82 Actual	FY 83 Actual	FY 84 Actual	FY 85 Actual	FY 86 Budget Estimate
665	653	636	620	598	*612

*President's Budget

At this time we are not planning any reorganization to minimize the impact of declining staff. Rather we are reviewing management procedures to find new ways to streamline our operations, and thereby make better use of staff time.

5. Would you explain for the Subcommittee the duties of the counseling psychologists and those of the vocational rehabilitation specialists? How do their qualifications differ?

Several witnesses pointed out in their testimony that the average caseload for a vocational rehabilitation specialist (VRS) is 167. I understand that some state vocational rehabilitation specialists have a caseload of about 50. It seems to me that a VA VRS could be seriously overburdened. Is it possible that the system needs more vocational rehabilitation specialists and fewer counseling psychologists?

Duties of the Counseling Psychologist

VR&C provides professional counseling and evaluation services to disabled veterans under chapter 31, pensioners under chapter 15 and to veterans, dependents and servicepersons under chapters 30, 32, 34, and 35 of title 38 United States Code, as well as chapter 106 title 10, United States Code.

Each service disabled veteran who applies for rehabilitation benefits under chapter 31 is provided an individual evaluation by a counseling psychologist (CP). The CP evaluates the veteran's functional capabilities and limitations, assesses interests, aptitudes and abilities in order to determine eligibility and entitlement and to assist the veteran in selecting an appropriate vocational goal. Then the CP, the Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist and veteran develop an Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP) which sets forth the overall goals, objectives, actions to be taken, evaluation criteria, and overall responsibilities. As necessary, CP's provide personal adjustment counseling to veterans who are receiving services and assistance under an IWRP.

Qualifications for Counseling Psychologist

Qualification standards for the CP positions are contained in Office of Personnel Management Handbook X-118, April 1978.

Counseling and evaluation services in the VR&C Division are provided by qualified counseling psychologists, GS-180-11 and GS-180-12. At the GS-11 level a CP must have satisfactorily completed two full years of graduate study in an accredited educational institution directly related to professional work in counseling psychology or successfully completed all requirements for a Master's degree directly related to counseling psychology. In addition to the basic education required for all grade levels, one year of professional experience which demonstrates the use of vocational/educational counseling techniques used in assisting clients in selecting career goals and either rehabilitation counseling of disabled or handicapped persons or personal adjustment counseling is required. At the GS-12 level, one additional year of experience in these areas is required.

Duties of the Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist (VRS)

Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists (VRS) work together with the counseling psychologist and the veteran in planning a program of rehabilitation services. They have the primary responsibility to assure that those services are delivered timely, the veteran profits from those services, and adjustments to the program are made as necessary. The VRS assists the veteran in obtaining employment by directly providing assistance and placement, or coordinating the delivery of other employment assistance services.

The VRS carries out these responsibilities through ongoing contact with the veteran and the trainer or employer. This

requires the VRS to spend a substantial proportion of his or her time in travel to confer with the veteran, training staff, employers and other significant persons and review progress reports and other information.

In addition to providing direct service to veterans, the VRS has a key role in the DVB system of internal controls for program management. Within this context the VRS reviews each claim for payment from service providers including schools, rehabilitation centers, independent instructors and others to assure that services provided are those authorized, and the cost of these services are as agreed in contracts or published documents which serve as a basis for reimbursement of costs.

Qualifications for the Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist

The provision and coordination of rehabilitation services in the VR&C Division is provided by qualified vocational rehabilitation specialists, GS-1715-7 thru 11. Positions encompassing the full range of VRS duties and services, including the application of special procedures in difficult cases, problem-solving counseling assistance, case management responsibilities, Career Development Center Coordination, limited adjustments in the trainee's program and objective, Independent Living Program services, job development and employment assistance are classified at GS-1715-11 in the Office of Personnel Management Handbook X-118, March 1970.

As a basic requirement for all VRS positions, applicants must have education or experience as described under A, B, or C below:

A. Three years of experience which provided a general knowledge of training practices, techniques and requirements in one or more occupations; or

B. A full four-year course in an accredited college or university leading to a bachelor's degree; or

C. Any time equivalent combination of experience and education as defined in A or B above. (In combining education with experience, an academic year of study which comprised 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours will be considered equivalent to 9 months of experience.)

In addition to meeting the basic education and experience requirements, applicants for GS-7 or higher grades must have the amount and kind of specialized experience indicated below:

Grade	Years of Specialized Experience
GS-7	1
GS-9	2
GS-11	3

Specialized experience is defined as:

1. Ability to obtain and apply occupational information for the handicapped.

2. A working knowledge of the interrelationships with the various professional and specialist services typically involved in the vocational rehabilitation process.

3. Ability to employ the methodology and techniques of counseling (but not full professional knowledge) in motivating and encouraging the individuals served by the program.

Comparison of Qualifications for Counseling Psychologists and Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists

Qualifications for CP's and VRS's differ in the level and type of the required education and experience. CP's at the journeyman GS-12 level, are required to have either 2 full years of graduate study related to counseling psychology or a master's degree related to counseling psychology. In addition CP's are required to have 2 years of specialized experience which demonstrates the use of vocational/educational counseling and either rehabilitation or personal adjustment counseling. For journeyman VRS positions either a baccalaureate degree or 3 years of general experience and 3 years of specialized experience is required. With the CP position, candidates are required to have a full

knowledge of the methodology and techniques of counseling and be able to employ them in a professional manner. The VRS candidates are not required to have the same professional qualifications as are expected of CP's.

Conclusions

Vocational rehabilitation specialists and counseling psychologists have different roles. Each is vital to the program. The typical VRS is responsible for an average of 167 chapter 31 veterans under chapter 31. They are overburdened and unable to provide the level of quality services the service-disabled veteran deserves. To cope with the increase in the VRS's workload, counseling psychologists are required to assume a number of VRS responsibilities, jeopardizing their ability to provide counseling and evaluation services. The impact of this workload is most critically evident in the difficulties we experience in providing comprehensive employment services. At this time the system needs more counseling psychologists in addition to more VRS's if we are to effectively rehabilitate a greater portion of our chapter 31 veterans.

6. Six out of the eight regional offices reviewed by the General Accounting Office indicated that they felt DVOP specialists were ineffective.

a. Do you believe that this is still the case? Has the Veterans Administration/Department of Labor interagency agreement improved this situation?

b. Do you think the experience gained through EVJTA has helped improve the relationship between vocational rehabilitation personnel and DOL personnel?

c. How many DVOP's are currently assigned to VA regional offices? How many of these are in the VR&C Service?

a. The evaluation of the DVOP (Disabled Veteran's Outreach Program) is the responsibility of the Department of Labor, and we defer to their judgment. However, we can make the following observations in relation to chapter 31 participants. The effectiveness of DVOP's can be improved through training and clear delineation of responsibility. The VA/DOL agreement can contribute to progress in both areas. We are exploring these possibilities for improvement with DOL through continuing monitoring of the implementation of the DOL agreement at the local level, and other means.

b. Yes. The EVJTA program has established additional ways in which VA and DOL staff work together. For example, a number of regional offices established group orientation activities in which VA and DOL staff walked the veteran through the process of using the program to become employed. In addition a number of new employer contacts were made which should benefit some chapter 31 participants.

c. Approximately 43 full-time and 25 part-time DVOP's are located in the regional offices and available to provide services to the VR&C activity.

7. I am delighted that the VA is now implementing the special employer incentives under Chapter 31. It is interesting to me that this is just now being implemented although the authority has been available since the enactment of PL 96-466. Is it possible that the success of the Emergency Veterans' Job Training Act (EVJTA) persuaded the VA to finally use this authority?

We see few similarities between the employer incentive program under chapter 31 and the program authorized under EVJTA other than the provision of reimbursement to employers for training expenses. The effect of EVJTA has been to enable eligible, primarily non-disabled veterans to obtain the training needed for meaningful employment. The program authorized under chapter 31 is targeted for service-disabled veterans who are having serious problems in obtaining employment, although they possess the training which is generally needed for employment in their fields. Given these differences, we have made no inferences or, projections about the chapter 31 employer incentives program from EVJTA experience.

8. What is the relationship between the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Service and the Department of Medicine and Surgery? Is there an overlap in services? Is there close cooperation between the two?

There is close cooperation between the Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling staff and our coworkers in the Department of Medicine and Surgery. It would be very difficult to conduct the vocational rehabilitation program and other training and rehabilitation programs without such cooperation. Since the VA is a large and complex organization, there is a need to set out these cooperative relationships in specific terms to provide needed services in a timely manner and avoid possible duplication of services. Instructions pertaining to coordination and cooperation in vocational rehabilitation under chapter 31 and other DVB programs, and rehabilitation activities under DM&S programs are provided in regulations, manuals and other instructions governing the conduct of these programs.

9. In testimony presented to the Subcommittee two years ago, a witness pointed out that it took so long for a veteran to have an initial evaluation scheduled that many veterans chose not to pursue chapter 31 training. What is the average length of time between the initial application and the first appointment? Are you satisfied with this? What can be done to reduce this time?

The average length of time between the initial application and the first appointment is 78 days. We are not satisfied with this and are continuously trying to reduce the elapsed time for this process. VA requires that the veteran's application be processed within 5 days of receipt and once received in VR&C that the veteran be scheduled for a Chapter 31 appointment which is no more than 15 days in the future. Both of these requirements are generally met. When this is not the case, experience suggests a significant portion of the period beyond 15 days can be attributed to a veteran's failing to report for the initial appointment, or the need to schedule an initial appointment at a later than desired date to accommodate the veteran's schedule.

10. Section 1515 of title 38, U.S. Code, provides the Administrator the authority to utilize rehabilitation resources outside the Veterans Administration. Has the Administrator exercised his authority under this section? For example, how many veterans are pursuing chapter 31 training in a Federal agency, as provided in Section 1515(a)(1)?

The VA utilizes a wide variety of rehabilitation resources, both VA and non-VA. Non-VA rehabilitation resources include schools, business facilities which provide on-job training and specialized rehabilitation facilities.

There are 269 veterans in training in Federal agencies under the provisions of section 1515(a)(1) as of June 27, 1985.

11. It is pointed out in the GAO report that a factor contributing to the inability of a rehabilitated veteran to find employment is the lack of available jobs in the veteran's field. Does the VA, in its counseling, encourage the veterans to pursue training in fields with available positions? Do DVOPs help advise veterans of employment opportunities in their fields?

As part of the initial evaluation process developed for each chapter 31 applicant, the counseling psychologist, the vocational rehabilitation specialist and the veteran engage in a comprehensive review and analysis of all possible information, including psychometric assessment, which may be used for sound rehabilitation planning. The veteran is assisted throughout the counseling process to identify potential objectives which are consistent with his or her aptitudes, abilities, interests and limitations.

A significant aspect of the suitability of an occupational choice is the anticipated employment opportunities which may exist upon completion of the training program. Both the counseling psychologist and vocational rehabilitation specialist are aware of the current and future employment trends in the local geographical area. If an occupational choice is considered which has limited marketability in the local area, the veteran is advised of the limits, given information on other geographical areas which may better support the marketability of the chosen occupation, and is also assisted in developing alternative occupational goals. Once the vocational rehabilitation goal is agreed on, the objectives, including employment marketing in a given geographical area are developed and the training program is initiated. The goals and objectives of the training programs are incorporated in the IWRP (Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan). The plan may be changed as necessary during training. One reason for

change could be decreased availability of employment in the field in which the veteran is training.

The IEAP (Individualized Employment Assistance Plan) is developed at a later point in the program. The plan describes the specific steps to be taken in helping the veteran become employed in the field or objective in which he or she has trained. The plan is jointly developed by the VA and the veteran. The DVOP may also participate in the development of the plan. The DVOP's assistance is generally requested in helping the veteran to secure employment, and the DVOP would generally be expected to advise the veteran of employment opportunities with specific firms, or help develop such opportunities.

12. Would you describe the role of the Veterans' Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation for the Subcommittee? I would think this Committee could be an important tool and provide significant comment and recommendations.

The Veterans' Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation provides advice and consultation to the Administrator of Veterans Affairs regarding the administration of veterans' rehabilitation programs under title 38, U.S.C. The committee includes disabled veterans and persons distinguished in the fields of rehabilitation medicine, vocational counseling, training, rehabilitation, and employment.

The goals of the Committee are:

(1) To assess the VA's progress toward achieving a continuous, coordinated and comprehensive rehabilitation program.

(2) To assess whether the VA is meeting legislative mandates in the area of rehabilitation.

(3) To formulate recommendations for the Administrator and his staff for ways in which the VA can increase service delivery.

(4) To assess the congruence of the rehabilitation needs of veterans and the services available through the VA rehabilitation programs to meet these needs.

(5) To assess the future rehabilitation needs of veterans.

The Committee has made a number of recommendations in reaching these goals. These recommendations include the creation of a system under which disabled servicepersons in process of discharge could be contacted regarding their eligibility for benefits and services administered by the VA earlier than is the case under current procedures, review of DRG's (Diagnostic Related Groups) and their impact on allocation of resources for VA rehabilitation programs, a cost-benefit study of the vocational rehabilitation program authorized by chapter 31, title 38, United States Code, and the VA's rehabilitation research program.

13. In their testimony, the Paralyzed Veterans of America indicated that 75% of their membership who participated in chapter 31 training remain unemployed. What can the VR&C staff do to improve the placement of catastrophically disabled veterans in jobs?

Vocational rehabilitation of the catastrophically disabled veteran presents difficult problems throughout the entire process, including selection of a suitable occupational objective, suitable facility at which to pursue training, provision of necessary services during training to assure successful completion, as well as placement in employment. Because of these problems, a number of additional options have been developed to meet the special training and employment needs of these veterans. These options include providing training in the home, arranging for pursuit of an independent study program in the home, and using vocational training courses in rehabilitation facilities. Despite these and other special provisions, the effects of catastrophic disability and related problems may be such as to cause a participating veteran to leave the program before he or she completes the training portion of the program. When a veteran interrupts his or her program, the VA follows up to see if he or she is able to reenter at a later date. If the veteran cannot reenter at the point expected, we continue to followup with the veteran to see if reentry is possible at a later date. The extent to which the unemployed former chapter 31 participants surveyed by PVA left the program because of such problems is not clear.

Many of the same factors which affect the catastrophically disabled veteran's ability to participate in training, also adversely affect his or her ability to secure and maintain suitable

employment. Some of the steps we are taking to improve employment services generally will also improve such assistance for catastrophically disabled veterans. These include providing additional training, and improving coordination with DOL staff through development of more clearly defined procedures in local VA-DOL agreements. In addition, the special resources for employment of the most severely disabled veterans will be reviewed and highlighted during our proposed training program for FY 86 and FY 87 (see question 2). This includes the special authorities which are in place to facilitate the employment of disabled persons in the public sector, the use of the special employer incentive program under chapter 31 and other means. In this regard, we plan to contact PVA to explore the extent to which we can identify, contact and assist some of the former chapter 31 participants who are not currently employed.

CHAIRMAN DASCHLE TO DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

NATIONAL SERVICE and LEGISLATIVE HEADQUARTERS
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November 1, 1985

Honorable Thomas A. Daschle
Chairman
Education, Training &
Employment Subcommittee
Veterans Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Daschle:

During the oversight hearings on the VA's Vocational and Rehabilitation Program on September 10, 1985, it was requested that the DAV provide for the record information relative to the number of veterans assisted by us in obtaining vocational rehabilitation benefits.

I regret to inform you that our reporting system does not differentiate between vocational rehabilitation or other education benefits. Accordingly, I am unable to specifically tell you how many veterans were assisted by us in obtaining Chapter 31 benefits.

However, for the 12 month period ending June 30, 1985, our National Service Officers successfully represented 24,330 veterans for education benefits. This of course includes Chapters 31, 34 and 35.

If we are able to provide any other information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

RONALD W. DRACH
National Employment Director

RWD:cp